

PART TWO

DIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

PREAMBLE

Part Two of this study builds on the international context of the history and diversity of higher education institutions outlined in Part One by presenting a more detailed analysis of the history and diversity of Australian higher education. Australia has much in common with New Zealand, the subject of a parallel study in Part Three. Both countries share similar historical roots and colonial histories, exist as close neighbours in the South Pacific, and have similar social and political systems. Australia is considerably larger and, in terms of its higher education system, is arguably further advanced.

Part Two comprises two chapters. The first, Chapter 4, provides a picture of the post-war evolution of higher education in Australia and the impact of national policy on institutional diversity. It shows that diversity has ebbed and flowed over the last 50 years as both an intended and unintended outcome of government policy. The final section of this chapter looks at the contemporary higher education system in Australia, and draws some conclusions about the current state of diversity amongst its institutions, as seen from different stakeholder perspectives.

Chapter 5 presents a series of illustrations of institutional diversity from the particular perspectives of three Australian universities which were established in the years immediately following the major higher education reforms of 1988. The three universities, namely Queensland University of Technology, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the University of South Australia, represent examples of new universities of technology with a strong commitment to being distinctive within the Australian higher education system.

CHAPTER 4

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Australian higher education has undergone a dramatic transformation over the last 50 years, in common with most other countries of the Western World. Central to this transformation was the rapid change from elite to mass higher education that occurred after the Second World War. This necessitated some fundamental policy changes by the Australian Government that resulted in an expanded higher education system comprising universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs). The latter were established to accommodate demand for post-secondary education which concentrated on short-cycle vocational training and were seen as quite distinctive from traditional universities. They were also relatively cheap.

Approximately 20 years later, this binary system was dismantled and replaced by the Unified National System (UNS). The 18 universities and 47 CAEs have become 37 semi-autonomous multi-campus universities in active competition in a quasi-market environment which was intended to foster institutional specialisation and diversification. The extent to which this diversification has actually occurred and the forms that it takes are unravelled in the sections to follow.

POST-WAR HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

In common with the rest of the Western World, Australian universities experienced a period of very rapid expansion after the conclusion of the Second World War. They moved away from more or less total State supervision and support with the introduction of Commonwealth funding through the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training

Scheme (CRTS). This contributed to an almost immediate doubling of enrolments in higher education compared to the equivalent pre-war figures.

However, the universities were slow to respond to the rapid growth in enrolments, and conditions deteriorated through the early 1950s. The Murray Report (Committee on Australian Universities 1957) investigated the overcrowding and under-funding of Australian universities, and the weak state of university research. The report resulted in the establishment of the Australian Universities Commission, and increased Commonwealth funding to universities.

By 1960, there were ten universities in Australia enrolling 53,000 students (compared with around 15,000 at the end of the War). However, enrolments in other post-secondary education institutions and colleges were also growing rapidly, and these institutions were suffering from similar problems of underfunding and overcrowding to those experienced by the universities. The need to give greater attention to these other forms of post-secondary institutions was recognised, and in 1961 the Martin Committee was established to review the whole tertiary education sector. The key recommendation of this committee (Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia 1964), was to establish a binary system of higher education, comprising universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs). This established universities as the institutions which would undertake research and provide degree level study, with colleges of advanced education concentrating on vocational education and diploma level study. However, while the new CAEs were to be primarily involved with technical and vocational education, the Martin Report suggested that they should also be concerned with courses in the humanities, arts and social sciences.

In spite of pronouncements in the report that the new colleges of advanced education were 'different but equal', there remained a status distinction between them and the universities. There was a strong suggestion that only a certain limited section of the community was suited to university study, and that the more practical vocational education of the CAEs would meet the needs of those not in this group. It was also

clear that the Committee believed that Australia needed people with both types of education to help the country's economic development. This view, that

...university studies are...analytical and theoretical in a significant part of their content...there are large numbers of young Australians whose interests and abilities are not well served by studies of that kind. Their interests and abilities, or both, incline them to more practical forms of higher education.... industry and commerce have great need for people who have received that kind of education. (Malcolm Fraser: *The Age*, 10 July 1969)

was echoed by senior members of the Government on numerous occasions over the next several years. It could be suggested that the Martin Committee was still under the influence of the British tradition of elitism in university education, and considered that vocational education was a separate and somehow less worthy activity than the 'academic' education of the universities.

Successive reports of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Advanced Education also emphasised that CAEs were established to provide specialist training for the vocations, and were to have different needs and a different outlook to universities, the former being more concerned with the application than the development of knowledge. Such a viewpoint has, to a greater or lesser extent, remained (perhaps promoted by the traditional universities) ever since, and has dogged the development of institutes and universities of technology with their overt vocational and applied missions. Another distinction at that time was the preponderance of part-time enrolment in the CAEs compared to the full-time study undertaken by the majority of university students. Part-time study has to a certain extent continued to be a characteristic of vocational education.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s enrolments in both CAEs and universities expanded rapidly, as a result of the post-war 'baby boom'. New universities (five in early 1970s) were established, and colleges of advanced education grew from 26 in 1965 to 78 in 1975. Existing universities also expanded through extensive capital works programmes to accommodate their enrolment growth.

As both sectors grew in enrolments they also tended to grow towards one another, and the larger CAEs looked to offer higher level qualifications to meet the needs of their students and, probably, the aspirations of their staff. In 1969, the Wiltshire Report (Committee of Inquiry into Awards in the Colleges of Advanced Education, 1969) recommended that CAE qualifications be based on the terms diploma and degree, but that CAE degrees should have ‘a distinctive style of nomenclature...in general different from that in Australian universities’ (*ibid.*, p.34). In fact, the Wiltshire Report went further in its efforts to maintain a clear differentiation between CAEs and universities, albeit that it was recommending that both offer degree level programmes. According to the Committee,

...much of the work of university staff is research oriented and academic standing is enhanced by scholarly publication. Courses leading to a first degree are frequently structured to facilitate the progress of students with scholarly gifts to higher education. If the Colleges of Advanced Education allow such considerations to blur their basic vocational purpose there will be grave danger that they will lose their special quality, become indistinguishable from universities and fail to achieve their social purpose. (*ibid.*, p.15)

These words have become unnervingly prophetic when applied to the Australian higher education sector of the 1990s. Yet it is hard to believe that the Committee couldn’t, even at that time, realise the inevitability of the changes they appeared desperate to prevent. As soon as CAEs offered degree-level education there was an implicit requirement that the staff teaching in these degrees would engage in some form of scholarship and research. The very nature of the degree demands that this occur, even if it is not directly funded. For the Committee and successive funding authorities to ignore the inevitability and necessity for research to inform teaching for degree awarding institutions was either ignorant or naive.

Throughout this period, the older universities struggled to adapt to the new environment. They had been established on traditional grounds as highly autonomous institutions with very loose management structures and committee-based ‘collegial’

decision-making processes. Academic departments were isolated and independent. The need to be accountable for the expenditure of government funding, and to respond appropriately to the requirements attached to that funding, did not come naturally to the universities.

The 1960s and 1970s also saw widespread student unrest about the quality of education and the relevance of the curriculum, especially at university level. Students progressively became active participants in university decision-making through a process of democratisation.

Overall, universities were cushioned by growth, and

...with growth there is a capacity for creativity, innovation and experiment; the inevitable mistakes can be contained and bypassed without too much agonized reappraisal. A stable university, with its revenue growing little faster than wages and prices, must create a capacity for creativity and experiment which is the lifeblood of any university, by reallocating its resources, not by channelling new funds. Reallocations of this sort must hurt and may imperil morale. (Willett 1972, p.113-114)

In 1974 the Commonwealth assumed full responsibility for funding higher education (both universities and colleges of advanced education), and later established the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) to provide advice on tertiary education (including TAFE) to government. In 1975, triennial funding was suspended, and continued pressure for growth in tertiary education was ameliorated by channelling growth in the cheaper CAE and the State-controlled TAFE sectors.

By the mid-1970s many CAEs were offering undergraduate degrees and the emerging central institutes of technology that had developed in the capital cities of each state began to move away from their original conception towards the pattern of the universities. At the same time, many traditional universities started to offer qualifications in areas which had traditionally been regarded as vocational (such as teaching and nursing). The boundary between university and CAE education was

becoming increasingly blurred, and was occurring at multiple levels within each sector. A major distinction to remain was that universities were better funded than CAEs and, in particular, were explicitly funded for research. The breadth of change towards an intersection of purpose and function of universities and CAEs is discussed in greater depth in the next section and is summarised in Figure 4.1. It is at this point of intersection that the concept of a new kind of university began to emerge in the mid-1980s.

However, before this new kind of institution could properly emerge, it was necessary to stop the runaway cost escalation of higher education in Australia, brought about in part by the continued rapid growth in participation in both sectors, and by the proliferation of small colleges of advanced education funded by the Commonwealth.

Recurrent grants to universities per EFTS therefore fell by 6% in the early 1980s, and in 1981 the Fraser Government 'Razor Gang' proposed a student loans system (which was blocked by the Senate) and a wide-ranging programme of institutional amalgamations involving the CAEs (which subsequently took place).

By the mid-1980s the concerns expressed so strongly at the time the binary system was established were becoming a reality and there were moves in some states (Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland) to redesignate some major CAEs as universities. The concept of a binary system was clearly under challenge, and its demise was eventually formally announced in a 1988 Government White Paper (Dawkins 1988). This paper established the unified national system (UNS) of higher education. This fundamental reorganisation of higher education in Australia was predicated on the basis of increased diversity, but nowhere does the White Paper indicate the ways in which this increased diversity would be measured. Presumably it would relate to the 'educational profiles' of individual institutions, commitment to which was a condition of membership of the new system.

Commitment to the educational profile was not the only condition, however. Member institutions were also required to commit to requirements for internal management,

credit transfer between institutions, staffing arrangements, a common academic year, agreed performance indicators over the triennium, and equity goals. Most significantly for many, it was also determined that member institutions would need to have a minimum sustainable student load of at least 2000 equivalent full-time student units (EFTSU). Smaller institutions were thus required to merge with one another or with larger institutions. In addition, the White Paper required institutions on adjacent or shared sites to amalgamate under a single educational profile and a single management structure.

While the Dawkins White Paper undoubtedly provided the policy 'muscle' for the national unified system, it required a further report some twelve months later to give effect to many of the changes the White Paper had announced. This report (Task Force on Amalgamations in Higher Education 1989) provided the rationale for a vast number of amalgamations between small CAEs and between CAEs and universities. It also formally acknowledged the reality that these new institutions would be called universities, although one could read a degree of reluctance into statements on this issue.

It is clear from the general pattern of amalgamation proposals that the majority of institutions in the UNS will be titled universities. This does not mean that the higher education system will lose any of its existing functions, or that existing institutions will acquire by changes in title alone resources to perform additional functions..... Rather it will lead to a system in which all institutions, irrespective of title, will be able to perform a wider range of functions than those that were typical of either sector in the former binary sector. (*ibid.*, p.14)

The report went on to describe the characteristics of a university. In doing so it acknowledged the traditional model of an Australian university as one with a 'general commitment to research and scholarship' and a 'substantial involvement in training for higher degrees' (*ibid.*). However, it also recognised that the role of a university should be much broader than this, and concluded that universities recognised within the UNS should demonstrate

- a range of academic and professional programs covering all types of higher education award from sub-degree to higher degree and conforming to recognised national and international standards of performance;
- a substantial body of academic staff appropriately qualified to teach at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and with recognised professional standing in their respective discipline areas;
- a general commitment to free enquiry and to the search for and preservation of knowledge through teaching, research and professional practice with a corresponding record of achievement in each major field of activity provided;
- a range of capital facilities, equipment and other resource materials suitably designed and of appropriate standard to serve the needs of both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and research;
- an effective and efficient management system with appropriate procedures for institutional planning, staff development, research support and academic program review, and taking into account relevant national priorities concerned with community liaison, access and equity. (*ibid.*, p.16)

These characteristics are broad indeed when compared with the guidelines for the establishment of a university in New Zealand (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 1992) which expanded the legislated definition of a university¹ enshrined in the Education Amendment Act 1990. The similarities and differences between the Australian and New Zealand approaches to the character of a university will be further explored in Part Three.

By 1991, the 19 universities and 47 CAEs of the pre-Dawkins era had been transformed into 30 universities, which expanded to 35 universities by 1994. By 1996 there were 650,000 students studying at university level in 36 publicly funded universities in Australia. Their route to university status was generally by one of four distinct processes:

¹ the legal definition of a New Zealand university from section 164 of the Education Amendment Act 1990 is presented in Figure 6.2.

1. Redesignation by application to the State Government, and evaluation by an assessment group established by the State Government after agreement from the Commonwealth.
Examples: Curtin University of Technology, University of Technology, Sydney and Queensland University of Technology.
2. Sponsorship from an already established university following agreement of State and Commonwealth Governments.
Example: University of Western Sydney, sponsored by the University of Sydney.
3. Incorporation of a small institution with an existing university by legislation.
Example: the incorporation of the Melbourne CAE with the University of Melbourne.
4. Establishment as a semi-autonomous university college of an existing university, and later establishment as an independent university.
Examples: University of New England, Wollongong University, Ballarat University.

Table 4.1 provides a full list of Australian universities together with the year each was established as a university.

University autonomy has remained relatively high, but has undoubtedly been eroded in the 1990s, as the Commonwealth imposed a range of line items in their budgets. In addition, a special funding allocation for quality assurance was introduced and maintained for three years in the early 1990s. The funding allocation was based on each institution's quality rating (as determined by a small group of 'experts'), and resulted in a tendency for the universities to converge towards a presumed model of best practice (set by the more successful institutions) in an attempt to acquire more funding.

In more recent years universities have been given greater autonomy through the collapsing of line items in the funding allocation, and the introduction of student fees to create a quasi-market environment. At the same time, the government has increased accountability requirements, and this has also had the effect of promoting conformity, as individual institutions strive to meet the government's requirements with respect to efficiency and effectiveness, measured by a universal set of performance indicators.

Table 4.1 Australian Universities within the Unified National System (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2001)

INSTITUTION	Year est. as a university
NEW SOUTH WALES	
University of Sydney	1851
University of New South Wales	1949
University of New England	1954
Macquarie University	1964
University of Newcastle	1965
University of Wollongong	1975
University of Western Sydney	1989
Charles Sturt University	1990
University of Technology, Sydney	1990
Southern Cross University	1994
VICTORIA	
University of Melbourne	1853
Monash University	1958
La Trobe University	1964
Deakin University	1974
University of Ballarat	1990
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	1992
Swinburne University of Technology	1992
Victoria University	1992
QUEENSLAND	
University of Queensland	1909
James Cook University of Queensland	1970
Griffith University	1971
Queensland University of Technology	1988
Central Queensland University	1992
University of Southern Queensland	1992
University of the Sunshine Coast	1999
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	
University of Western Australia	1911
Murdoch University	1973
Curtin University of Technology	1987
Edith Cowan University	1991
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	
University of Adelaide	1874
Flinders University of South Australia	1966
University of South Australia	1991
TASMANIA	
University of Tasmania	1890
NORTHERN TERRITORY	
Northern Territory University	1988
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY	
Australian National University	1946
University of Canberra	1990
MULTI-STATE	
Australian Catholic University	1991

According to Coaldrake and Stedman,

The rapid growth in higher education in Australia was not a product of any acceptance by government of the civilising role of universities, it was always pragmatically based, vocationally focussed and sought to achieve its ends as cheaply as possible (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1998, p.24).

It is therefore no wonder that the distinction between universities and CAEs was eventually removed. It is also not surprising that the newly established universities had far more in common with their more traditional older counterparts than they did points of distinction. What distinctions there were at the point of establishment in the early 1990s would appear to have progressively diminished as the universities converged towards a non-articulated common form. This issue will be explored further in the sections to follow.

Today, there are 43 higher education institutions in Australia (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2001). Of these, 37 are Commonwealth-funded universities of the UNS. These universities have been grouped in a variety of ways to indicate commonalities and differences, notably by Marginson (1998) and Marginson and Considine (2000) and DETYA (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1998). These approaches to identifying distinctiveness amongst Australian higher education institutions will be explored in the next section.

THE EBB AND FLOW OF DIVERSITY

The fluctuating fortunes of diversity and the intended and unintended consequences of government policy on diversity in Australian higher education have been discussed at length in a variety of contexts (for example, Meek 1991; Goedegebuure, Lysons and Meek 1993; Meek and O'Neill 1996; Marginson 1998; Meek and Wood 1998; Coaldrake and Stedman 1998). In this section, an attempt will be made to draw the issues raised by these and other authors together, and to describe and explain the recent history of diversity in Australian higher education.

A brief history of the development of post-war higher education in Australia was presented in the preceding section. During this period the Australian higher education system expanded from 15,000 to around 700,000 students and moved from a unitary to a binary and back to a unitary system. Two critical policy developments were central to this fluctuation, each promoted in the cause of greater diversity for the sector, but approaching this desired end from diametrically opposite perspectives. The first of these was the Martin Report of 1961, which established the binary system of universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs). The second was the Dawkins Reform of 1988 which removed the binary divide and re-established a unitary system of higher education in Australia.

Before and immediately after the Second World War, the Australian higher education system consisted of a small number of universities, one to each state capital, that were remarkably similar.

What was taught in one place was not only held to be as good as what was taught in the others but also was likely to be similar in content. Likewise, course structures were familiar from place to place, as were the range of subjects offered and degrees provided. (Meek and O'Neill 1996, p.61)

In other words, diversity was very limited, due, according to Meek and O'Neill, to the common blueprint from which the universities were designed, and to the low level of student mobility that minimised any form of competitive differentiation. The universities were part of a 'club', membership of which required certain common features. Paradoxically, the common features are never clearly articulated, for as Meek (2000) comments, 'throughout history there never has been a single model of *the* university or a "higher education gold standard"' (*ibid.*, p.27) (italics in original). In spite of this, Australian universities maintained a high level of homogeneity on a basis not unlike that which promoted a similar uniformity amongst Canadian universities, as described in Chapter 3.

There were, however, two notable exceptions to this homogeneity. The Australian National University (ANU) was established in 1946 as a postgraduate research

university, deliberately different to the existing universities. In a sense, therefore, its establishment generated diversity in an otherwise homogeneous university system. But in reality, this diversity was an unintended consequence of the policy by which it was established. Ironically, by the early 1960s, the distinctiveness of the ANU was largely lost when it was amalgamated with the Canberra University College, and began to offer a more or less traditional range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

A similar story could be told about the New South Wales University of Technology. Established by the NSW Government in 1949, 'its core concerns was (sic) teaching and research in science and technology, but its courses included humanities and commerce components in recognition of the need to educate the full human being' (University of New South Wales 2001). The Press saw its purpose somewhat differently.

If the distinction is properly understood, the new technological centre may well aid and buttress the University of Sydney. By taking over much of routine instruction, it can open the way for more original research, social leadership, and free discussion and interchange of ideas at the senior institution. But if both are to play their full part, it is necessary that the distinction between them be clearly realised by those who provide their finance. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1950.

Within ten years, the New South Wales University of Technology had become the University of New South Wales, and is now regarded as one of Australia's foremost research universities (Coaldrake and Stedman 1998).

The need for genuine diversity in Australian higher education arose with the huge increase in participation which occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. The government response to this need was encapsulated in the Martin Report in 1961. This report established the binary system, comprising colleges of advanced education (CAEs) on the one hand, and universities on the other. A primary objective of this reform was to provide students with post-secondary education opportunities that best suited their needs and capabilities. It is worth noting that, in practical terms, the establishment of the CAEs did not strictly increase student choice, one of the prime benefits of diversity according to Stadtman (1980). Rather it provided opportunities for tertiary study to a

large group of people for whom it would previously have been denied. Students whose abilities ‘incline them to more practical forms of higher education’ (Malcolm Fraser, *The Age*, 10 July 1969) were channelled into the CAEs, and those with the capacity for ‘analytical and theoretical’ (*ibid.*) studies continued to access universities. In other words, the establishment of the CAEs effectively saved the universities from having to adjust their traditional mission and move out of their comfort zone. As Meek and O’Neill (1996) state, ‘the creation of the binary system differentiated the higher education provision and protected the universities from diversity’ (*ibid.*, p.63).

With the passage of time, the initial distinction between the university and the CAE began to crumble. On the one hand, by the early 1970s CAEs were offering undergraduate degrees, and students were arguably given genuine options in their choice of graduate programme and institution. Central institutes of technology were emerging in each state with more in common with universities than the CAEs from which they originated. On the other hand, universities were awakening from the complacency that had enveloped them and were extending their offerings to new professional areas that had previously been the domain of the CAEs.

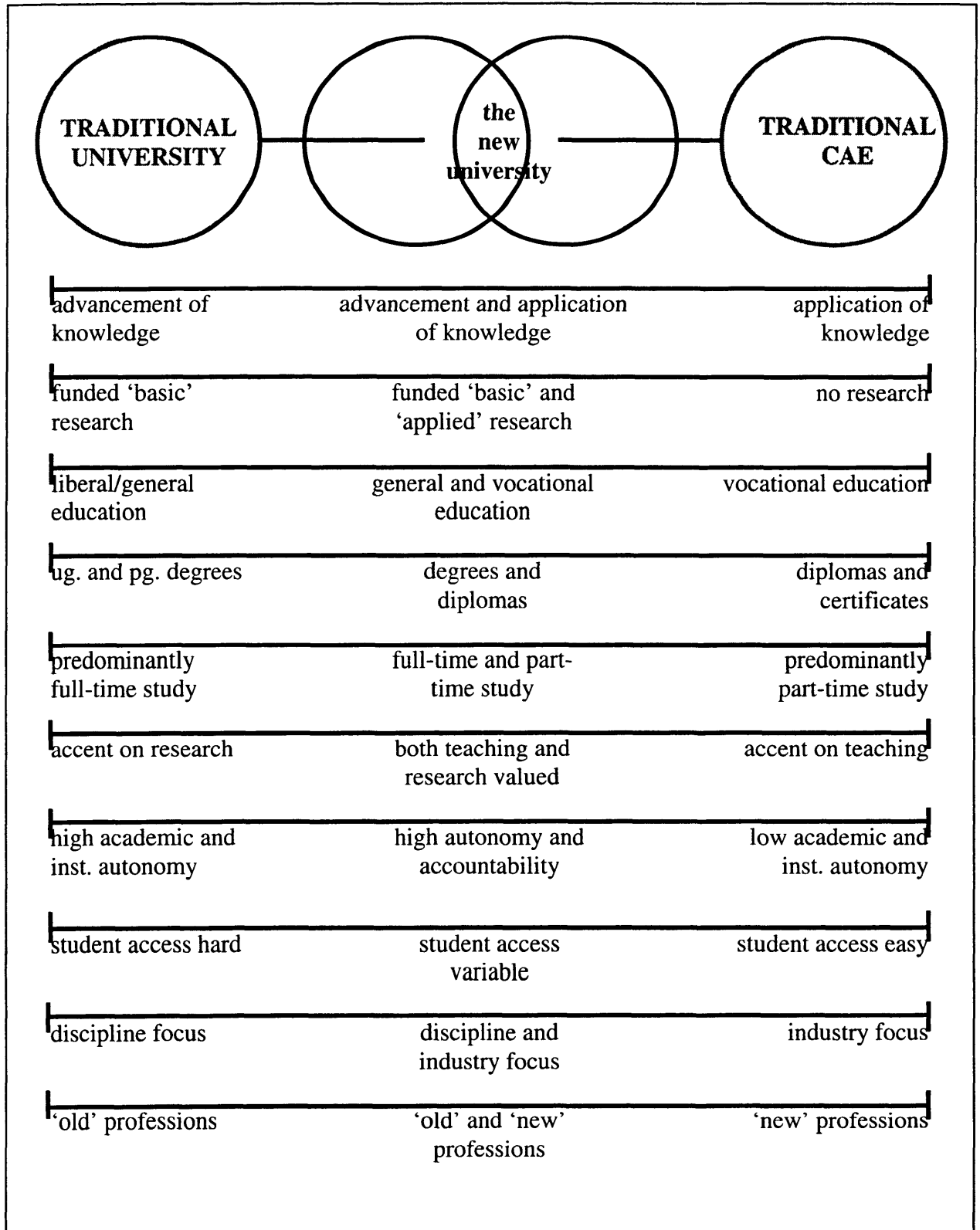
In terms of diversity, while there can be no doubt that the establishment of the binary system was a prime example of centrally driven policy to increase diversity in higher education in Australia, and while it initially achieved much in this regard, this achievement was gradually eroded. Convergence, rather than diversity, became the name of the game, promoted by ‘system-wide policies governing competition over scarce resources’ which ‘seemed to encourage an unhealthy duplication of function and programs’. (Goedegebuure, Lysons and Meek 1993, p.396). As the demand for higher education continued to grow at a dramatic rate throughout the 1970s and 1980s, universities and CAEs came under increasing pressure to broaden their activities. CAEs were lured by the status of the postgraduate research environment, and universities by the opportunities for funded growth in disciplines previously regarded as vocational (such as nursing and teaching). The resulting convergence was accelerated as both universities and colleges grew to meet demand by broadening their offerings (and

thereby duplicating those of their competitors), rather than expanding in the areas in which they were already established. The end result was the gradual emergence of a 'new university', formed by a convergence of purpose and function. The key elements of this convergence are shown diagrammatically in Figure 4.1.

This increasing conformity, the pressure from central institutes of technology to achieve university status, and growing concerns about the costs of a burgeoning multi-institution higher education system all contributed to the policy decisions contained in the 1988 Government White Paper: Higher Education: A Policy Statement (Dawkins 1988). This new policy, amongst other things, dissolved the binary system of universities and colleges of advanced education by introducing the Unified National System (UNS), and proposed the consolidation of institutions through a process of amalgamation. It was this latter act which, in effect, removed the colleges from the higher education system, rather than the notion of the UNS. In a few years after the Dawkins reforms, the CAEs either amalgamated with one another or with already existing universities to create a higher education system of some 30 universities, expanding to 37 by 1999, most of which are multi-campus and mixtures of previous colleges and universities.

Diversity was fundamental to the Dawkins reforms. According to the White Paper, 'the new arrangements will promote greater diversity in higher education rather than any artificial equalisation of institutional roles... Diversity and quality are paramount; the unified system will not be a uniform system' (Dawkins 1988, p.28). Underlying Dawkins' bold assertion about the value and future of diversity in higher education was the premise that 'institutional competition in a deregulated environment will stimulate institutions to diversify their educational programmes and research activities: each university will come to occupy particular market niches' (Meek and O'Neill 1996, p.66). It was also a strongly held belief that a competitive market would generate greater efficiency and effectiveness in the higher education system.

Figure 4.1 The convergence of purpose and function of the university and the college of advanced education in the 1970s and 1980s



Central to the achievement of a competitive market was the notion of deregulation. 'According to official proclamations, government policy moves the co-ordination of higher education away from a tightly controlled and highly regulated centralised bureaucratic system towards one of self-regulation' (*ibid.*) In reality, the experience of Australia and many other 'deregulated' systems is that central regulation and bureaucracy does not diminish, it simply changes shape.

The deregulation of the Australian higher education system certainly gave universities what they cherished most dearly: academic freedom and the autonomy to 'do what they want' in an academic sense. However, this deregulation was a two-edged sword, and the autonomy brought with it a new notion for the university, one that has preoccupied it internally and externally over the last ten years, that of accountability. While the government released the shackles in terms of a university's ability to do what it wanted, it replaced them with a new set that controlled the standards required of them in the execution of this new 'freedom'.

Much has been written about the relationship between diversity and market competition (Meek and Wood, 1997b; Marginson, 1998; Marginson and Considine 2000; Meek, 2000; Fairweather, 2000; Neave, 2000). Overall, there is a prevailing contention amongst writers that competition does not necessarily lead to greater diversity. To the contrary, it is suggested that competition actually breeds conformity. This is certainly the case in discussion on the Australian higher education system. For example, commenting on the reaction of universities to the 'competitive' environment of the early 1990s, Meek and O'Neill state that

... large universities pursued amalgamations with colleges in order to become bigger than their already large neighbours. In at least some cases, status emulation led newer universities to imitate the older ones in order to obtain a greater share of the same benefits. In others, universities diversified their functions in order to avoid direct competition. (Meek and O'Neill 1996 p.70)

A critical point about this and other similar statements is that competition in a true market sense did not exist in higher education in the early 1990s in Australia. The fact

that at best only a quasi-market could exist when government regulation and funding remain powerful drivers, a point made frequently by many writers, is not the issue in this case. What is the issue is that universities in the early 1990s were preoccupied with growth in a rapidly growing market. They did not have to 'compete' for students, they had to accommodate them. In the context of Meek and O'Neill's contention (above), universities were diversifying, not so much by avoiding direct competition but by ignoring it. Diversification was more a means of accommodating additional students, many of whom were first generation, and who were looking for a different product to the one that universities had traditionally provided. Universities had to offer a broader range of opportunities to meet demand in a growing market. The effect of this internal diversification was, of course, convergence, and a gradual reduction in institutional diversity across the system.

Competition did exist in Australian higher education during this period, but it was not strictly market competition, in the sense that 'market' means 'customers'. Where competition did exist between institutions, and where Meek and other writers are quite correct in their assertion that competition promotes convergence, is in the area of competition for government funding, which continues to be the single most important contributor to university income.

Australian government policies on quality and research have both deliberately promoted a competitive environment. With quality assurance, a graduated grant allocation was provided to institutions depending on where they figured on the quality 'league table'. Amongst a range of consequences over the three years that this policy was in force was 'a good deal of institutional imitation in terms of quality procedures and practices' (Meek and O'Neill 1996, p.71). A similar trend is evident with the establishment of a competitive research funding environment. Again, the outcome is one of imitation rather than greater diversity.

According to Coaldrake and Stedman (1998, p.24) 'a striking feature of our universities is their centripetal tendency. Although founded with diverse intentions and structures,

they have drifted towards one another'. The Australian National University (ANU) and the University of New South Wales are good examples of universities created with specific specialised missions that later became highly successful 'mainstream' universities. Similarly, Monash University, according to its Vice Chancellor, Dr J.A.L. Matheson, was designed to be a university 'different in character' to other universities, but has ended up 'disappointingly like the University of Melbourne' (Wilkes, 1965, p. 26).

In spite of the ambitious visions of its institutions and government commitments to institutional diversity and distinctiveness, the higher education sector in Australia has inexorably drifted towards institutional convergence. This, according to Meek (1991, p.451), is a clear example of 'the process of 'homogenisation' of higher education, a process which seems to involve an 'upward drift' of institutional goals, characteristics, and functions towards the top of an institutional status hierarchy'. The drivers for this convergence are multiple and varying in their effect. According to Coaldrake and Stedman (1998), they include:

- Australia's egalitarian tendencies - if one university offers a certain programme in a certain way to a certain group, then this programme should be available to all other groups;
- the limited mobility of Australian students and staff between institutions, which leads to duplication;
- the dominance of the Commonwealth's uniform funding provisions and accountability requirements;
- the desire of some new universities to be like the older, longer established 'sandstone universities' in an attempt to gain borrowed prestige and reputation;
- the move of the older more traditional universities into vocational areas formerly the domain of the CAEs and new universities of technology;
- the uniform approach to research funding across all universities which is still tilted in favour of the traditional sandstone universities, and therefore requires the new universities to reproduce a similar research environment in an attempt to capture a greater share of available funding.

The distinctions between universities are diminishing. Most existing Western universities are responding to government pressures to be more accountable, more efficient, more transparently useful, and more applied in the sense that their graduates utilise their qualifications for some vocational purpose. At the same time government

policy continues to be one that encourages greater participation in higher education, while government contributions to funding universities are diminishing (on a per student basis). Traditional universities have therefore needed to become more entrepreneurial, to have clear income generating potential (through consultancy and applied research), and to constantly demonstrate to potential funders other than government that they can provide added value to the community and industry.

In other words, most Western universities, whether they started as traditional or applied institutions, are converging towards a millennium model of a university perhaps best described as 'comprehensive'. The remaining differentiator between the two forebears of this emerging institution is their contrasting attitude towards research, on two counts.

First, traditional universities have maintained a primary commitment to basic research in which the pursuit of new knowledge is still considered more important than its application. By contrast, newer universities, such as the universities of technology, still tend to focus on applied research in which the outcome and application of new knowledge is critical. Secondly, traditional universities still tend to place research above teaching as a measure of the worth of academic staff. Universities of technology and their equivalents, by comparison, tend to place teaching ahead of research as the primary determinant of an academic staff member's worth. Both of these distinctions are diminishing, however, as both types of institution converge towards the comprehensive university that will dominate higher education in the twenty-first century.

According to Coaldrake and Stedman,

The idea of university and the very nature of academic work are under constant challenge. The usual approach of universities is to rush to the trenches to defend hallowed traditions and ideals, to reassert the relevance of timeless values in a changing world. Some of this will be of benefit. If universities do not defend what is worthy then there are few who will, but much of this reaction will miss the point. What is needed is not a model of the university that seeks to preserve the 'glories' of the past, but a university that does what is appropriate and relevant for the future (*ibid.*, p.26).

A summary of the evolutionary trends that have marked the transformation of higher education institutions in Australia is presented in Figure 4.2, using a classification of Australian universities developed by Marginson and Considine (2000), which is discussed in more detail in the next section, and illustrated in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

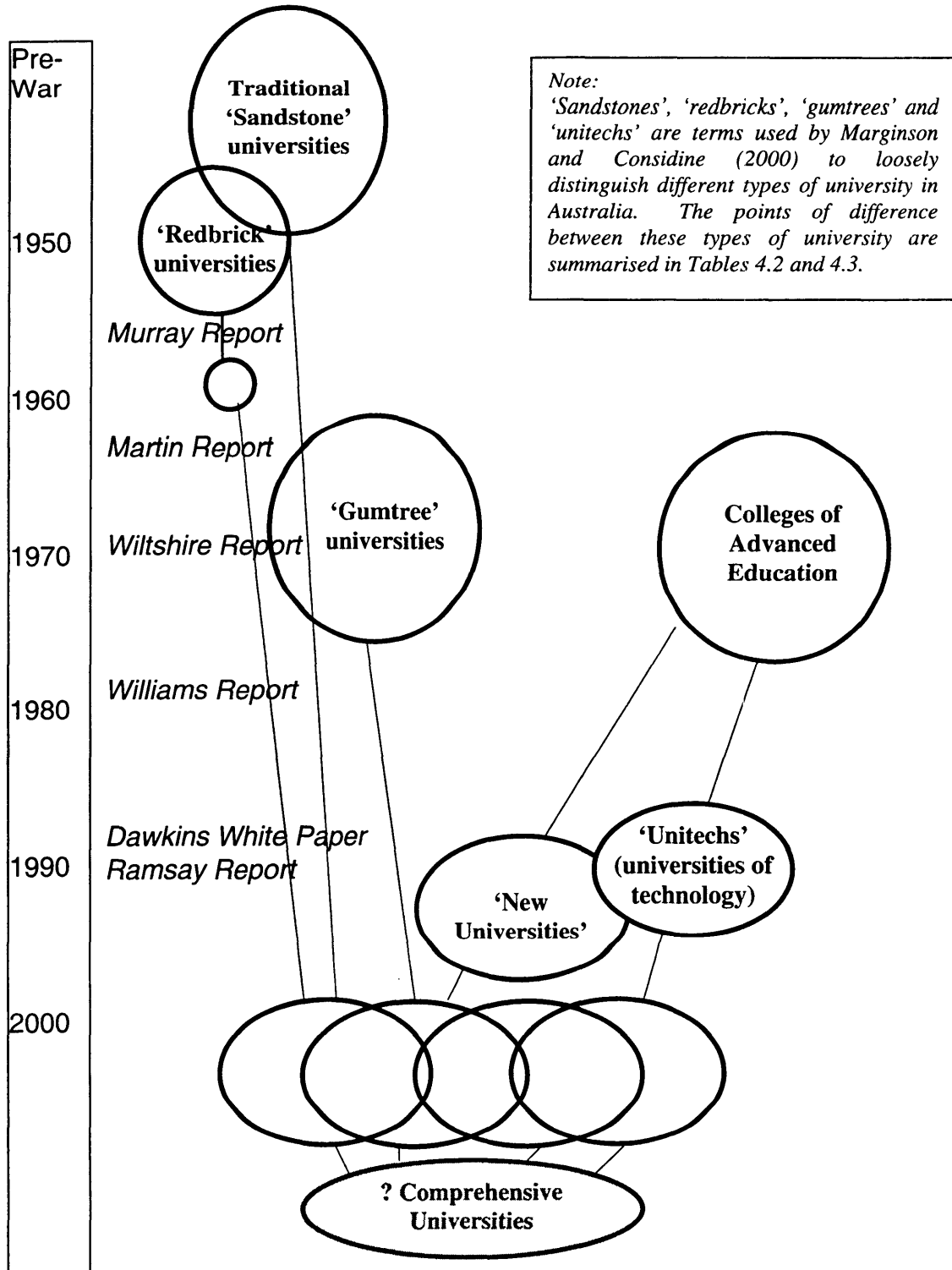
Interestingly, this drift towards homogeneity in the unitary Australian higher education system has taken a recent twist. In an attempt to differentiate themselves from other universities, the older, research-led universities (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and Monash) have formed a cartel through which they intend to promote their shared position as research universities in contrast to the newer universities which have, by and large, a far less developed research base. In a similar way, the new universities which emerged from the old state institutes of technology (Curtin, South Australia, RMIT, UTS, QUT) have formed an exclusive group to share best practice and promote their style of university. On the one hand such moves could lead to greater conformity within each of these groups, as they each collaborate in order to compete with the rest of the system. On the other hand, as each of these sub-systems further differentiates itself, the result may well be an increase in diversity for the system as a whole.

DIVERSITY IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The outcome of the Dawkins' reforms of the late 1980s was a dramatic and sometimes turbulent transformation of the higher education scene in Australia. A combination of three inter-related mega-changes were central to this transformation. They were:

1. The dismantling of the binary divide and the progressive dismantling of the CAE sector.
2. The encouragement and at times requirement for mergers of CAEs and between universities and CAEs to create new universities.
3. A national economic ideology which promoted competition between institutions in a quasi-market environment.

Figure 4.2 The convergence of Australian higher education institutions towards the 'comprehensive university' of the 21st century (terminology after Marginson and Considine, 2000)



According to Marginson (1998, p.87), as a result of these changes, ‘universities faced two imperatives: to position themselves successfully in the mainstream, and to differentiate themselves from each other. The first imperative limited the potential of the second’. The result has been a tendency for universities to conform to recognised models which have their roots in the pre-Dawkins era. Marginson initially classified the Australian universities of the 1990s into four categories, which are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Categorisation of Australian Universities in the 1990s (after Marginson, 1998)

CATEGORY	CHARACTERISTICS	UNIVERSITIES
SANDSTONES	Generally the oldest universities, claiming leadership in research, the academic disciplines and professional training.	Queensland; Sydney; Melbourne; Adelaide; Western Australia; (Tasmania)*; New South Wales; Monash; ANU
WANNABEE SANDSTONES	Pre-1987 universities making the same claim for prestige as the ‘sandstones’ but with less plausibility	Macquarie; New England; Newcastle; Wollongong; La Trobe; Deakin; Griffith; James Cook; Murdoch; Flinders
UNIVERSITIES OF TECHNOLOGY	Post-1987 universities emerging from the institutes of technology in the state capitals. Strong in business training, the technologies, and applied research in industry, emphasising relevance and employability	Queensland University of Technology; University of Technology, Sydney; Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology; (University of South Australia)*; Curtin University of Technology
NEW UNIVERSITIES	Post-1987 universities grounded in former CAEs emphasising access, teaching, customer friendliness and regional factors	Western Sydney; Charles Sturt; Southern Cross; Victoria, Ballarat; Swinburne; Southern Queensland; Central Queensland; Edith Cowan; Canberra; Northern Territory; Australian Catholic; Sunshine Coast

*brackets denote a marginal classification by Marginson

In spite of this categorisation, Marginson emphasised that the similarities between universities are more important than their differences. He suggested that all the universities had a common set of intentions such as:

- to be comprehensive of a wide range of professional preparation and offer broadly comparable programmes in core areas (e.g. business, engineering)

- to acquire research funding from the Australian Research Council and research centre initiatives
- to recruit international students

Later, Marginson (1999), and Marginson and Considine (2000) expanded and adjusted this categorisation to comprise five groupings, some of which are the same as those outlined above and some that are new. They are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Categorisation of Australian Universities after Marginson (1999) and Marginson and Considine (2000)

CATEGORY	CHARACTERISTICS	UNIVERSITIES
SANDSTONES	The oldest universities in each state. Each has some sandstone buildings. Redefined category from Marginson (1998)	Sydney; Queensland; Adelaide; Western Australia; Melbourne; (Tasmania)*
REDBRICKS	The strongest of the post-war universities. Very similar to the sandstones in size, academic role, income, but less history. Each has some redbrick buildings. New category from Marginson (1998)	New South Wales; Monash; Australian National
GUMTREES	Newer Pre-1987 universities commonly planted with native trees such as gums. Equivalent to the <i>Wannabee Sandstones</i> of Marginson (1998)	Griffith; Newcastle; Flinders; James Cook; Deakin; La Trobe; Macquarie; Wollongong; Murdoch; (New England)*
UNITECHS	The old institutes of technology of each state, with a strong vocational and industry-orientation. Equivalent to the <i>Universities of Technology</i> of Marginson (1998)	Queensland University of Technology; University of Technology, Sydney; RMIT; Curtin; South Australia
NEW UNIVERSITIES	The other post-1987 universities. Equivalent to the <i>New Universities</i> of Marginson (1998)	Western Sydney; Charles Sturt; Southern Cross; Victoria, Ballarat; Swinburne; Southern Queensland; Central Queensland; Edith Cowan; Canberra; Northern Territory; Australian Catholic; Sunshine Coast

*brackets denote a marginal classification by Marginson

Marginson's groupings have some appeal in that they provide a ready means of distinguishing and labelling universities using language that is easy to recall, if rather excessively value-laden. Certainly his category labels have prevailed and are widely

used in informal and formal discussion about Australian higher education. How valid they are in conversations about diversity is another matter. On even simple examination they are built around the focus and reputation of the sandstone universities on the one hand and the universities of technology on the other. The 'redbricks' are the post-war 'sandstones' and 'gumtrees' (the old 'wannabees') are all the other pre-Dawkins universities that don't make the sandstone category. The 'new universities' are all the post-Dawkins universities that don't make the 'unitech' category. In particular the 'new universities' grouping seems to be a 'catch-all' for any post-Dawkins university which is not classified as a 'university of technology' even if they use this generic title in their formal name (for example, Swinburne University of Technology). Marginson and Considine (2000) acknowledge this by considering this grouping 'a heterogeneous sub-sector ...[that] may eventually fragment into separate groupings of regional rural institutions, regional metropolitan institutions, and various specialists' (*ibid.*, p.201).

There are, in reality, myriad ways in which Australia's universities may be categorised. Some approaches, such as the quality assessment undertaken by the Quality Assurance Committee, and the utilisation of research quantum funding, undeniably result in a ranking of universities. Even Marginson's categories are in essence a form of vertical differentiation, with the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks' competing for top ranking; the 'unitechs', having 'strengthened their role and moved above the pre-1987 universities outside the 'Sandstone' group' (Marginson 1998, p.90), next; followed by the 'gumtrees' (or 'wannabees'); with the 'new universities' at the bottom.

The isomorphic tendencies of the universities of each grouping are inversely related to their ranking. The more vulnerable 'new universities' are most prone to emulate universities higher in the ranking - they are the newest and the least well-established, and probably have the greatest capacity for change. Some, such as Swinburne University of Technology and perhaps Victoria University of Technology and Ballarat, through their amalgamation with TAFE Colleges, are arguably moving towards the 'unitech' grouping. Others are leaning towards a more traditional model. Emulation amongst the 'gumtrees' appears to be firmly in the direction of the traditional

'sandstone' model, thus Marginson's alternative name - the 'wannabees'. For the universities of the other groupings, emulation is less apparent. The 'redbricks' have already converged with the 'sandstones' and in most respects (other than their building architecture) are indistinguishable from them. The 'unitechs' have carved out a niche for themselves, and today display little overt isomorphic tendency.

Some general comments about the measurement of diversity in higher education were made in Chapter 3. The key point to be reiterated here is that the selection of indicators to be used to quantify the extent of diversity across a higher education system, or to chart the changes in diversity over time, depends entirely on the stakeholder group for whom the concept of diversity has meaning. The work of DETYA (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2001) provides a huge volume of data about Australian higher education institutions, but their selection of appropriate indicators for discussions about diversity seems to be based on the theoretical perspectives of the researcher rather than the more practical perspective of one of the stakeholding user groups.

Meek and Wood (1998) presented 'one of the first comprehensive attempts to quantify diversity and system change in Australian higher education' (*ibid.*, p.100), by comparing commencing student enrolments for 1960 and 1966 on a broad range of characteristics which include:

- the broad fields of study;
- the mode (internal, external) and type of attendance (full-time, part-time);
- the course type (first degree, second degree, research higher degree, other)
- the fee status of the student (Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) liable, international and domestic fee paying); and
- access to education by equity groups (e.g. Indigenous Australians, female, rural and isolated) (*ibid.*, p.101).

While the study is comprehensive, and the data extensive, the conclusions are disappointing. Meek and Wood acknowledge that

...there are substantial differences amongst Unified National System universities in terms of size and location of institutions, rate of growth, concentration of international and domestic fee-paying students, mode of attendance, concentration of research students, and to a lesser extent, coverage of the broad fields of study. On the other hand, all or nearly all Unified National System universities have experienced substantial growth, have at least some fee-paying students, external students, research higher degree students, and teach in most of the ten fields of study (*ibid.*, p.136).

They conclude that the universities 'are not all exactly the same, though the system is constituted by broadly comprehensive institutions ...[and] that the competitive environment in which Australian higher education now operates, pushes universities more towards imitative behaviour than to consciously differentiate' (*ibid.*). Such a finding would probably be disputed by many universities, using different indicators and seeing their universities from a different perspective. In particular, the universities of the Australian Technology Network (ATN) see their strong applied and vocational focus as a clear point of differentiation from the more traditional universities, and appear keen to foster that differentiation. This issue is explored in depth in the illustrations of Chapter 5, to follow.

Perhaps the most meaningful stakeholder perspective to consider in matters of institutional diversity is that of the student consumer. If institutional diversity is promoted by government policy, it is generally done so because the government wishes to maximise choice and access to higher education for a population which increasingly recognises the need to continue education throughout life. Diversity for this consumer is determined by more pragmatic features of institutions than DETYA statistics. For this reason the *Good Universities Guide* prepared by Ashenden and Milligan (1999) has become an annual feature of the bookshop shelves around the time that intending higher education students make their decisions. The first edition of this book was published in 1991 (Ashenden and Milligan 1991) and successive editions have ranked and classified universities according to indicators which are considered meaningful and immediately useful to consumers.

A summary of the indicators used by Ashenden and Milligan in 1999, together with the ranking/grouping of universities according to these indicators, is presented in Table 4.4. It is important to recognise that the ratings do not in themselves imply diversity across Australian universities, because the ratings are in effect a ranking of institutions for each characteristic into one of five bands representing the top 20% of universities, the next 20%, and so on. The bands give no indication in themselves of the amount of variation between an institution in the top band (rated 5) and an institution in the lowest band (rated 1). Nevertheless, given Ashenden and Milligan's purpose for selecting the characteristics, a reasonable amount of diversity would be expected for any particular characteristic across the full range of universities.

In Table 4.4, the universities are listed by age, and the university groupings of Marginson and Considine (2000) are superimposed. The table illustrates several trends:

1. Institutional prestige, based on a combination of success in research and demand from the most academically able students, correlates closely to age, and to Marginson's groupings. The 'sandstones', the oldest universities, and the 'redbricks' are clearly the most prestigious, and the 'new universities' the least prestigious. The 'gumtrees' and 'unitechs' compete for the middle ground.
2. A similar trend is evident for research performance, based on the 1999 Research Quantum, and for per capita income, and student demand.
3. The reverse trend exists with respect to entry flexibility, with the 'new universities' and 'unitechs' having more open admission policies than the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks'.
4. Credit for TAFE students is more readily provided by 'unitechs' and 'new universities', and less readily available at 'sandstones' and 'redbricks' with the notable exception of Monash University.
5. With respect to size, the 'sandstones' (with the exception of Adelaide and Tasmania), the 'redbricks' (with the exception of ANU) and the 'unitechs' are

Table 4.4 Australian universities rated by selected characteristics (from Ashenden and Milligan, 1999)

UNIVERSITY	est	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Sydney	1851	5	5	4	5	2	5	2	1	4	5	2	4	1	10	4	3	3
Melbourne	1853	5	5	5	5	1	5	1	2	5	5	1	5	1	1	2	4	3
Adelaide	1874	5	5	4	5	3	3	3	1	3	3	2	3	2	2	4	4	3
Tasmania	1890	4	4	3	4	3	2	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	3	3	3
Queensland	1909	5	4	5	5	1	5	2	2	4	5	2	4	2	2	2	5	2
UWA	1911	5	5	5	5	1	5	3	1	5	5	1	4	1	1	4	5	4
ANU	1946	5	5	5	5	2	3	3	1	4	2	2	2	-	2	4	5	2
UNSW	1949	5	5	5	5	2	4	1	1	4	5	1	5	1	1	5	4	5
UNE	1954	3	2	1	3	4	4	3	2	1	3	5	2	5	5	4	4	2
Monash	1958	5	4	4	5	3	3	1	4	4	5	3	5	4	4	3	3	4
La Trobe	1964	3	3	2	4	1	5	1	3	5	4	2	3	-	2	5	3	4
Macquarie	1964	4	3	3	4	2	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	4	4
Newcastle	1965	3	3	3	4	5	2	4	3	3	4	3	3	1	3	3	3	1
Flinders	1966	4	4	3	4	2	5	2	1	3	3	4	3	2	3	5	3	2
James Cook	1970	3	4	3	3	2	4	5	3	2	2	4	3	2	3	5	3	1
Griffith	1971	4	2	3	4	3	4	4	4	2	4	3	4	2	2	3	3	3
Murdoch	1973	3	3	3	3	2	5	3	4	2	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	2
Deakin	1974	2	3	3	2	4	3	3	2	4	5	4	5	5	4	1	2	3
Woollongong	1975	4	4	3	4	4	4	2	3	2	3	2	4	-	3	3	4	4
Curtin	1987	3	3	3	4	4	2	5	5	2	4	4	5	3	4	3	2	3
Northern Terr.	1988	1	4	-	2	5	5	5	4	1	2	5	2	3	5	4	1	2
QUT	1988	3	2	4	3	3	3	3	4	2	5	3	5	2	3	1	2	2
West. Sydney	1989	2	2	1	2	5	2	4	2	1	5	3	5	1	4	1	2	5
Ballarat	1990	1	3	1	1	3	3	2	2	4	2	2	2	-	2	3	1	2
Canberra	1990	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	-	3	3	3	3
Charles Sturt	1990	1	1	2	1	5	3	4	5	1	4	5	4	5	5	2	1	1
UTS	1990	3	1	4	2	4	4	3	5	3	4	3	4	-	4	3	2	4
Aust Catholic	1991	1	1	-	1	4	3	5	3	3	3	3	2	1	2	3	1	2
Edith Cowan	1991	1	1	2	2	5	2	5	5	2	4	4	4	4	5	2	2	3
South Aust.	1991	2	2	3	3	2	3	4	2	3	4	4	5	4	4	1	1	3
Central Queen.	1992	2	1	2	1	5	2	5	2	1	3	5	4	5	5	3	2	3
RMIT	1992	3	2	3	3	5	4	1	3	2	5	3	5	1	3	1	2	5
Swinburne	1992	2	1	2	2	3	4	1	5	3	3	2	4	1	3	3	2	4
South. Queen.	1992	2	1	3	1	5	4	3	2	1	3	5	5	5	5	2	2	4
Victoria	1992	1	2	1	2	5	2	1	3	2	4	3	5	-	3	3	1	5
Southern Cross	1994	1	1	2	1	5	1	5	4	1	2	5	2	5	5	1	1	2
Sunshine Coast	1999	1	-	-	1	4	-	-	3	4	1	4	1	1	1	-	-	1

Key

For each of the characteristics numbered 1 to 17, a score of 5 places the institute in the top 20% of institutions, 4 places the institution in the second 20% of institutions and so on.

1. Prestige: based on the level of demand for places and success in research (5 = highest prestige)
2. Per capita income based on the average per student operating income (5 = highest average)

continued next page

3.	Student demand	based on the proportion of commencing students from school who have a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) in the top 10% of students nationally, together with the modal TER of all commencing students (5 = highest proportion)
4.	Research performance	based on the Research Quantum (5 = highest RQ)
5.	Entry flexibility	based on the level of admission of students other than high-scoring school leavers or those with credit for university study (5 = highest level)
6.	Gender balance	based on the balance of male to female students (5 = best balance)
7.	Indigenous participation	based on the proportion of students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent (5 - highest proportion)
8.	Credit for TAFE studies	based on the proportion of students given credit for TAFE study (5 = highest proportion)
9.	School leavers	based on the proportion of first year students who are school leavers (5 = highest proportion)
10.	Size	based on the number of higher education students (5 = highest number)
11.	Mature age students	based on the proportion of students over the age of 25 years (5 = highest proportion)
12.	International students	based on the number of international students (5 = highest proportion)
13.	External students	based on the proportion of external students (5 = highest proportion)
14.	Part-time students	based on the proportion of part-time students (5 = highest proportion)
15.	Student-staff ratio	based on the number of students per staff member (5 = lowest ratio)
16.	Staff qualifications	based on the proportion of staff with PhDs (5 = highest proportion)
17.	Cultural diversity	based on the proportion of students with a non-English speaking background (5 = highest proportion)

Groupings of universities (after Marginson (2000))

☐	sandstones
☐	redbricks
☐	gumtrees
☐	unitechs
☐	new universities

the largest institutions, while the ‘new universities’ (with the exception of Western Sydney) tend to be the smaller.

6. Part-time enrolments are much lower at the ‘sandstones’ and ‘redbricks’ (again with the exception of Monash) and tend to be higher at the ‘unitechs’ and ‘new universities’.
7. Staff qualifications, measured by the number of academic staff with doctoral qualifications, are, not surprisingly, much higher at the ‘sandstones’ and ‘redbricks’ and lower at the ‘unitechs’ and ‘new universities’.

Overall, there is a reasonably level of consistency amongst Marginson's groupings for many of the characteristics that Ashenden and Milligan identify as useful for a student consumer wishing to distinguish one university from another, particularly with respect to the 'sandstones' (allowing for the fact that the University of Tasmania is a slight outlier within this group), and to a slightly lesser extent, the 'redbricks'.

The other grouping that carries an expectation of reasonable homogeneity is the 'unitechs', given their common origins and membership of the Australian Technology Network. The five universities of technology in this group are rated uniformly for the following characteristics:

- prestige (2-3);
- student demand (3-4);
- school leavers (2-3);
- size (4-5);
- mature age students (3-4);
- international students (4-5);
- part-time students (3-4); and
- staff qualification (1-2).

However, the same universities exhibit considerable diversity with respect to other characteristics, such as

- entry flexibility (2-5);
- indigenous participation (1-5);
- credit for TAFE studies (2-5); and
- external students (1-4).

The extent to which these similarities and variations are consistent with the way the leadership of selected universities of technology see their institutions will be explored further in the next chapter.

For the 'gumtrees' there is a moderate degree of consistency for the majority of characteristics, while for the 'new universities' grouping, the homogeneity is lowest for

the greatest number of characteristics. Overall, for the range of student-perspective characteristics presented by Ashenden and Milligan (1999), there would appear to be a reasonable degree of diversity in the Australian higher education system. However, this is not necessarily the case when another perspective is selected.

One of the defining characteristics of a university, indeed of any organisation, is its mission (or purpose, or vision, or strategic intent and so on). Similarly, the values of an institution can also be instrumental in identifying the character of an institution and what makes this institution distinctive. The mission and values together are supposed to provide a succinct statement about the institution that defines its distinctive, if not unique, character. As such they should be a most useful means of determining the extent of institutional diversity from a system perspective. This is a macro-view when compared to the micro-view of the student perspective which tends to focus on details specific to a student's particular needs.

In order to determine the extent of diversity amongst Australian universities from this macro perspective, an analysis of the mission and values (or equivalent) statements of thirteen universities has been undertaken. Those chosen are considered to represent two potential extremes of university types, namely the traditional research-led universities (the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks') on the one hand, and the vocationally focused, research-informed universities of technology (the 'unitechs') on the other. If there are no significant differences between the mission and values statements of these two kinds of university, it would be hard to imagine any greater variations with the universities of the other groupings.

The analysis is based on the identification and extraction of key words and phrases, and the comparison of the use of these words and phrases in the different institutions. The underlying assumption is that institutions which have the same or very similar sets of key words and phrases in their positioning statements are likely to be similar kinds of institutions. The converse of this, that institutions which do not have the same range of

key words and phrases must be different from one another, is a less certain assumption, for the reasons outlined below.

It is important to recognise the limitations of this kind of analysis. First, there is a wide variation in the style and volume of statements written by each university about its position and direction. The universities do not all use the same names for these statements, and it therefore becomes a matter of judgement to decide what to include in the analysis and what to exclude. Only a few universities have a formal values statement, so the values of each university have been extracted from positioning statements where ever they occur. Some statements are succinct and brief, and contain only a few key words that can be extracted for analysis. Others are comprehensive and sometimes circumlocutory, and contain a large number of key words and phrases. There is also the matter of accessibility. Surprisingly, not all of the universities have their positioning statements readily accessible on their Internet sites, while others provide easy access to comprehensive statements of strategic intent and corporate plans. The same variability applies to the institutions' annual reports.

The outcomes of the analysis of purpose statements are summarised in Table 4.5, and those for values statements are summarised in Table 4.7. In each case, the material used for analysis is that available on each university's website typically under the heading of 'mission statement' and/or 'goals' or 'vision statement', frequently as the precursor to the university's strategic plan. As might be expected, the ease with which this material may be accessed varies considerably, as does the amount written. In most cases the mission/vision statements are around 100 to 200 words, but a few are considerably longer. Most statements include an overt reference to institutional values as well as a statement of intent.

The statements have been analysed first for the characteristics of each university's mission, and secondly for expressions of values. In each case, key words and/or phrases have been identified and their occurrence in each university's statements recorded. The results have been presented in tabular form for each university in the

Table 4.5 Analysis of the purpose statements of selected Australian universities

PURPOSE CHARACTERISTICS	'Unitechs'					'Sandstones'					'Redbricks'		
	QUT	UTS	RMIT	USA	CUT	Queen	Syd	Melb	Adel	WAus	NSW	Mon	ANU
Education													
Professional													
Technical													
Knowledge/Understanding													
Application													
Extension													
Creation													
Preservation													
Transmission													
Advancement													
Frontiers													
Teaching and learning													
Multi-disciplinary													
Flexible													
Life-long													
High calibre staff													
Research													
Real world research													
Applied													
Consultancy													
Research training													
Problem solving													
Fundamental research													
Research-Intensive													
Scholarship													
Service to communities													
Community/society													
Professions													
Government													
Business/industry													

Table 4.5 cont.

PURPOSE CHARACTERISTICS	'Unitechs'					'Sandstones'					'Redbricks'		
	QUT	UTS	RMIT	USA	CUT	Queen	Syd	Melb	Adel	WAus	NSW	Mon	ANU
Culture													
Development													
Intellectual													
Cultural													
Economic													
Social													
Professional practice													
Technology													
International outlook													
Students													
Student-centred													
Diversity													
Graduate profile													
Leadership													
Employment/careers													
Quality/excellence													
Social commentary													
Relevance													

three selected groupings of universities, ('unitechs', 'sandstones' and 'redbricks'). It is important to remember that these statements represent only what each university wishes to *state* publicly about its purpose and priorities, and therefore, by inference, about what it values most on these issues. The statements do not necessarily reflect actual performance, although each university would be expected to dispute that view, and to present data that would support the verisimilitude of their guiding statements.

Referring initially to the analysis of mission statements in Table 4.5, on first impression there may not appear to be a very clear distinction between the three groups of institutions. Certainly, there are some clear points of commonality which may go some way to answering the question: 'what is a university?'. For example, the clear majority of universities make overt reference to the following primary activities in their mission statements.

1. Knowledge and understanding

Mentioned by four of the five 'unitechs'; three of the five 'sandstones' and two of the three 'redbricks'.

2. Teaching and learning

Mentioned by four of the five 'unitechs'; all of the 'sandstones' and two of the three 'redbricks'.

Note that both RMIT ('unitech') and UNSW ('redbrick') talk about 'education' but make no specific reference to 'knowledge and understanding' and 'teaching and learning'.

3. Research

Mentioned by all universities.

4. Scholarship

Mentioned by all 'unitechs', four out of five 'sandstones', and one out of three 'redbricks'.

5. Service

Mentioned by all of the 'unitechs', three out of the five 'sandstones' and one out of the three 'redbricks'. In particular, all of the universities which mention service also specifically mention 'service to the community and/or society'.

6. International outlook

Mentioned by all universities.

When the detail of the manner in which these common themes are addressed in each university's mission statement is examined, some distinctions between the 'unitechs' on the one hand, and the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks' on the other, do emerge. Under the heading of 'knowledge and understanding', the 'unitechs' are more inclined to talk about *application, extension, creation, and advancement*, while the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks' focus more on *preservation, transmission and advancement*.

For 'teaching and learning', while all but one university makes specific reference to this activity (the exception being the University of New South Wales), it is only the 'unitechs' that offer any significant amplification by reference to issues such as *flexibility and continuing education*.

There is a similar trend for 'research', with the 'unitechs' being more inclined to elaborate on the specific kinds of research that are important to them, by overt reference to *real world research, application, consultancy and problem-solving*. By contrast, the occasional amplification provided by the other universities utilises expressions such as *research training, fundamental research and research-intensive*.

Supporting statements under the general heading of 'service to communities', in addition to the across-the-board support for service to the *community* and/or *society* in general, indicate scattering of universities from each of the groupings which talk specifically about service to the *professions, government and industry*.

Of the other key words and phrases that receive more than an occasional mention, *students* are far more frequently referred to by the 'unitechs' than by the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks'. In contrast, the notion of *quality* as a performance characteristic (as opposed to a value - see Table 4.7) is highlighted by universities of the latter two groups, but mentioned by only one of the 'unitechs'.

A summary of the particular words or phrases used by two or more of the five universities of either the 'unitech' grouping or the 'sandstone' grouping in their respective mission statements is provided in Table 4.6. Generalising from this summary, it can be inferred that the mission statements of 'unitechs' and 'sandstones' have more in common than they do points of differentiation, but that there are nevertheless sufficient points of difference to support the notion that the two groupings exist.

Table 4.6 Summary of words and phrases in the purpose statements of two or more universities belonging to either the 'unitech' or 'sandstone' grouping

UNITECHS	SANDSTONES
application, creation and advancement of knowledge and understanding	preservation, transmission and advancement of knowledge and understanding
teaching and learning: flexibility, continuing (life-long) education	teaching and learning (no amplification)
research and its application	research (no amplification)
scholarship (no amplification)	scholarship (no amplification)
service to the community, to the professions	service to the community
professional practice (no amplification)	professional practice (no amplification)
technology - its application and promotion	
international outlook (no amplification)	international outlook (no amplification)
students in general, graduate profile	
	quality/excellence of performance

The analysis of the values statements from the same three groupings of universities is presented in Table 4.7. The words and phrases that each university has used in a values context have been loosely arranged into three groups; organisational values, social values, and positional values. In contrast to the distribution of words and phrases used in the purpose statements, there is far less commonality amongst words used to denote values by each university. Those that are common to all three groupings of universities are:

1. Quality/excellence
Mentioned by three of the five 'unitechs', four of the five 'sandstones' and all three of the 'redbricks'.
2. Cultural diversity

Table 4.7 Analysis of the values statements of selected Australian universities

VALUES CHARACTERISTICS	'Unitechs'					'Sandstones'					'Redbricks'		
	QUT	UTS	RMIT	USA	CUT	Queen	Syd	Melb	Adel	WAus	NSW	Mon	ANU
Organisational values													
Competence	■												
Quality /excellence		■	■	■		■	■		■	■	■	■	■
Institutional autonomy							■		■				
Academic freedom								■		■	■	■	■
Scholarship													
Self-evaluation										■			
Accountability							■		■				
Continuous improvement									■				
Social values													
Cultural diversity		■	■	■	■			■	■		■		■
Equality/equity													
Fairness			■							■			
Social responsibility	■		■	■	■		■			■	■		■
Community awareness	■												
Individual development			■						■				
Ethical behaviour			■	■			■				■		
Respect					■	■							
Independent thought						■						■	
Tolerance							■			■			
Honesty													
Understanding													
Harmony								■					
Merit													
Justice									■				
Openness to ideas									■	■	■	■	■
Courtesy													
Integrity										■			■
Collegiality													■

Table 4.7 cont.

VALUES CHARACTERISTICS	'Unitechs'					'Sandstones'					'Redbricks'		
	QUT	UTS	RMIT	USA	CUT	Queen	Syd	Melb	Adel	WAus	NSW	Mon	ANU
Positional values													
Practicality			■									■	
Innovation			■	■	■		■			■			
Enterprise			■	■	■								
Competitiveness	■		■	■	■								
Flexibility	■	■	■	■	■								
Collaboration/teamwork		■	■	■	■	■			■				
Relevance	■	■	■	■	■				■				
Creativity			■	■	■				■	■			■
Responsiveness			■	■	■				■	■			■
Curiosity			■	■	■				■	■			■
Vision			■	■	■				■	■			■
Critical thinking			■	■	■	■			■	■			■
Problem solving			■	■	■	■			■	■			■
Sustainability			■	■	■				■	■			■
Environmental care			■	■	■				■	■			■

Mentioned by four of the five 'unitechs', two of the five 'sandstones' and two of the three 'redbricks'.

3. Social responsibility

Mentioned by four of the five 'unitechs', two of the five 'sandstones' and two of the three 'redbricks'

Points of difference between the 'unitechs' on the one hand, and the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks' on the other, are readily apparent. In broad terms, the universities of the former grouping have more words and phrases depicting values that are grouped as positional, while the universities of the latter two groupings tend to use more words associated with social values. Words and phrases associated with organisational values are exclusive to the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks'. Looking in more detail at each of the values groups in turn, the following observations can be made.

1. Organisational Values

Nearly all of the universities analysed made reference to *quality* and/or *excellence* as a value. Otherwise, organisational values were exclusively the domain of the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks'. *Academic freedom* was identified as a key value by all but one university from these groups, and *institutional autonomy*, *continuous improvement* and *scholarship* by more than one.

2. Social Values

Outside the common ground of *social awareness*, and to a slightly lesser extent, *ethical behaviour*, reference to social values was largely the domain of the 'sandstones' and 'redbricks'. Values such as *tolerance*, *honesty*, *openness to ideas* and *integrity* were mentioned by more than one university from the latter two groups, but not mentioned by the 'unitechs'.

3. Positional Values

Positional values such as *innovation* and *creativity* were mentioned by more than one university from both the 'unitech' grouping and the 'sandstone' grouping. Otherwise, references to positional values such as *enterprise*, *flexibility* and *relevance* were made by more than one 'unitech' but not by any 'sandstones' or 'redbricks'.

A summary of the particular words or phrases used by two or more of the five universities of either the 'unitech' grouping or the 'sandstone' grouping in their respective values statements is provided in Table 4.8.

Generalising from this summary, it can be inferred that universities from the two groupings have a moderate degree of distinction in their choice of values, with the sandstones having a greater focus on traditional university imperatives such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and values such as equality/equity, respect, tolerance, honesty and openness to ideas, while universities from the 'unitech' grouping were more inclined to favour innovation, enterprise and flexibility.

Table 4.8 Summary of words and phrases in the values statements of two or more universities belonging to either the 'unitech' or 'sandstone' grouping

UNITECHS	SANDSTONES
Organisational values quality/excellence	Organisational values quality/excellence, institutional autonomy, academic freedom, continuous improvement
Social values cultural diversity, social responsibility, ethical behaviour	Social values cultural diversity, social responsibility, ethical behaviour, equality/equity, respect, tolerance, honesty, openness to ideas
Positional values innovation, enterprise, flexibility, creativity	Positional values innovation, collaboration/teamwork, creativity

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The post-war history of Australian higher education has much in common with other countries of the Western World. It is characterised by a rapid expansion in the numbers engaged in furthering their education beyond school, and by the complementary extension of engagement in higher education to groups of society for whom it had previously not been accessible. In other words, higher education moved from being the preserve of the elite to the domain of everyone and, today, is arguably considered to be

the right of everyone. The Australian government responded to this dramatic change by two very significant and different structural solutions, both attempting to create a more accessible and more diverse higher education system.

The first of these was the establishment of the binary system of universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs) in 1964. The colleges of education were created to be 'different but equal' to the universities. In reality, the differences that existed in the early 1960s slowly evaporated as the colleges took on more and more of the characteristics of the universities, but the equality was never achieved.

The second structural solution to the continuing growth in participation in Australia's higher education system was introduced in 1988. As with the establishment of the binary system, it was also predicated on a policy of increasing diversity in higher education. In sharp contrast, however, the new structural solution attempted to satisfy this policy direction by exactly the opposite mechanism to that employed twenty-four years earlier, by creating the Unified National System (UNS) of higher education to replace the binary system. The resultant raft of amalgamations and redesignations saw the higher education landscape of Australia change from one with 19 universities and around 50 colleges of education to one of 37 public universities, half of which are, in terms of their university life, less than twenty years old.

The inevitable question to be asked after twelve years of the UNS is: has the new structure of higher education in Australia, as Dawkins advocated, 'promote[d] greater diversity in higher education rather than any artificial equalisation of institutional roles' (Dawkins 1988, p.28)? The answer is, frustratingly, 'yes and no'!

From the day the colleges of advanced education were established, there was an inevitable manifestation of convergent behaviour between the universities and the CAEs. As Figure 4.1 illustrates, the CAEs expanded their degree level programmes and began to offer at the postgraduate level, and therefore engaged in research to inform their degree level teaching, even if this was not directly funded by the Commonwealth.

At the same time, the universities began to broaden their mission to include the application as well as the advancement of knowledge and to offer programmes for professional groups which had been the traditional domain of the CAEs.

In the post-Dawkins environment, this trend has continued. The newer universities, without the reputation and status that goes with a long and rich university history, have tended to adopt many of the hallmarks of traditional universities in an attempt to emulate the latter's status and prestige. These are Marginson's 'new universities' (Marginson 1999). Arguably the only post-Dawkins' universities to genuinely carve out a distinctive place in Australia's higher education system are the universities of technology (Marginson's 'unitechs'), which by virtue of their well-established institutional roots have managed to maintain a degree of distinctiveness amongst a largely normalised array of younger universities.

When looking at the Government's opposing approaches to the establishment of a diverse higher education system in Australia in 1964 and 1986, it is important to place the rationales for these approaches in the context of the prevailing economic environment and ideology of the times. The 1960s and 1970s were dominated by conservative government with strong centralist tendencies. It was inconceivable in this environment that a fundamental policy of increasing diversity in higher education could be left to the actions of individual institutions. The establishment of the binary system was therefore an understandable and inevitable approach to this policy at this time. In contrast, the 1990s have been dominated by a market-driven deregulated economy, and competition has been seen as the driver for institutions to maintain and develop their distinctiveness. In this ideological context it is just as understandable that the Government would not attempt to meet policy objectives by overt intervention if this could be avoided.

But, in spite of the Government's hopes and expectations, there is little doubt that deregulation and competition have promoted isomorphism amongst Australian universities. There is a natural tendency for the less successful to copy the actions of

the more successful in an attempt to improve their own status and performance. Australian universities, therefore, have much in common, and the Australian higher education system is composed of 'broadly comprehensive institutions' (Meek and Wood 1998, p.136). Interestingly, at the same time that many universities have tended to imitative behaviour, two groups of university have made deliberate attempts to differentiate themselves.

First, the universities of technology, which share a common history as the central institutes of technology of each state, have formed their own group, the Australian Technology Network (ATN). This group of five universities has maintained its exclusivity and has resisted attempts of other universities of technology to join it. However, it would be fair to say that it has, to date, done little to promote or enhance the special nature of its member institutions in the eyes of the public, most of whom would not be aware of the group's existence.

Secondly, the Australian sandstone universities and the three 'redbricks' (UNSW, ANU and Monash) have established the 'Group of Eight' as an exclusive group of researched universities. In contrast to the ATN, this group has achieved some public prominence. It could be argued that the primary motivation for these universities to establish themselves as an exclusive group comes from their perception of lost status when so many other institutions have the same generic name. The exclusive club to which they once belonged is no longer so exclusive, so a new and more exclusive club must be formed.

Overall, it is the universities of these two groups which represent the clearest illustration of differentiation amongst Australian universities. Whether the perspective is that of the student, or the government, or some other prime stakeholder, it is hard to deny that universities of these two groups have some fundamental and strongly held points of distinction. For all that, institutions at both extremes are undoubtedly 'universities', and there is no doubt that the newer type of university, the 'university of technology', is worthy of its university appellation. The analysis of the positioning

statements of 'sandstones' and 'redbricks' on the one hand, and 'unitechs' on the other, indicates some clear common ground for these two types of university, as well as some significant points of distinction.

The way in which the universities of technology have evolved since their establishment ten or so years ago, and the ways in which they established and maintained their distinctiveness, are explored in the next chapter through a series of illustrations of three member institutions of the ATN. The extent to which the differentiation and convergence evident amongst Australian universities is manifest in New Zealand higher education is explored in Part Three of this study.

CHAPTER 5

ILLUSTRATIONS OF DIVERSITY IN THREE AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

INTRODUCTION

The importance of different stakeholder perspectives on considerations of diversity in higher education has been stressed throughout this study. This has been illustrated by some analysis on diversity in the Australian higher education system from the student perspective, based on institutional characteristics presented to students to assist them in selecting their university of first choice, and from the macro system perspective, using the published mission and values statements of selected universities. A further critical perspective is that of the institution itself, particularly the senior management of the institution.

To investigate this perspective in depth, senior staff from three post-1987 universities belonging to the Australian Technology Network (ATN) have been interviewed about their views on the distinctiveness of their own university, both at the time it was established and now, and also about the diversity of the Australian higher education system as a whole.

Universities of technology are perhaps the universities with the greatest claim to being distinctive from the traditional model of the university exemplified by the 'sandstone' university in Australia. This is partly because of their history, partly because of their distinctive generic name, and partly because of their focus. The universities (of technology) from the Australian Technology Network (ATN) are also considered closest in form and function to UNITEC Institute of Technology, the New Zealand institution which is subject to in-depth analysis in Part 3 of this study. For these

reasons, three universities from the ATN have been selected for this illustrative investigation.

Those chosen are the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Victoria, and the University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia. Each of these universities has achieved university status in the post-Dawkins environment by somewhat different means, and each has signalled its university status with a different approach to the most overt signal of university status and distinctiveness, the name of the new university.

In the sections to follow, the analyses of interviews with senior staff from each of these universities are presented, together with a summary of the key issues which emerge from these analyses.

THE INTERVIEW FORMAT

Interviews were conducted with senior staff from each university who had a direct knowledge of the events surrounding each institution's redesignation as a university, and who remained with the new university for some time after redesignation. Critical interviews were held with the vice chancellors of each university, all of whom had been directors of their respective institutions immediately before redesignation. In each case, permission was sought and granted for the interviewees' names to be used in all references and quotations used in this study. This was considered to be important when interpreting the significance of the comments and opinions expressed. In addition, the written analysis of each interview was sent to each respective interviewee to check for accuracy, to invite further comment and to confirm their approval to use the interview material as presented. In all cases approval was reconfirmed and very few minor changes were requested.

The full list of interviewees is as follows:

Queensland University of Technology

Professor Dennis Gibson: at the time of interview: Vice Chancellor, QUT; at the time of redesignation: Director, QIT, then Vice Chancellor, QUT.

Professor Peter Coaldrake: at the time of interview: Deputy Vice Chancellor, QUT; at the time of redesignation: Head of School of Management, QIT, then Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research, QUT.

Professor David Gardiner: at the time of interview: Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research, QUT; at the time of redesignation: Dean of the Faculty of Law, QIT, then Dean of the Faculty of Law, QUT.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Professor David Beanland: at the time of interview: Vice Chancellor, RMIT²; at the time of redesignation: Director, RMIT, then Vice Chancellor, RMIT.

Professor David Pugh: at the time of interview: Emeritus Professor, RMIT; at the time of redesignation: Head of Department of Engineering, RMIT, then Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research, RMIT.

University of South Australia

Professor Denise Bradley: at the time of interview: Vice Chancellor, UniSA; at the time of redesignation: Director, SACAE, then Deputy-Vice Chancellor, UniSA.

Dr Ken Atkins: at the time of interview: retired; at the time of redesignation: Pro-Director, Academic, SAIT, then Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic, UniSA.

Mary Taylor: at the time of interview: Manager, Chancellory, and Secretary to Council UniSA; at the time of redesignation: Secretary to Council, SACAE.

Liz Watson: at the time of interview: Registrar, UniSA; at the time of redesignation: Registrar, SAIT.

Each interview was semi-structured and lasted from one to two hours. All of the interviews were taped, transcribed and analysed using QSR NUD*IST version 4 software. Each interview explored three key themes.

² Since the interview Professor Beanland has retired as Vice Chancellor of RMIT and has been replaced by Professor Ruth Dunkin, the former Deputy-Vice Chancellor. For consistency in this thesis, however, references to the 'Vice Chancellor' will refer only to Professor Beanland.

1. The extent to which diversity and differentiation were central to each institution at the time of redesignation, and the manifestation of that differentiation at that time.
2. The extent to which each institution has retained its differentiation since redesignation, and the current manifestation of that differentiation.
3. The impact of the political, funding and market environment of higher education on diversity in the system as a whole and on the differentiation of each institution and its neighbouring institutions.

The interrelationship between these themes and the specific response categories that emerged during the QSR NUD*IST analysis are summarised on the tree diagram in Figure 5.1. The process and rationale underpinning the derivation of the response categories is outlined in the Research Approach section of Chapter 1.

Figure 5.1 Tree diagram illustrating nodes utilised in NUD*IST analysis of interview transcripts

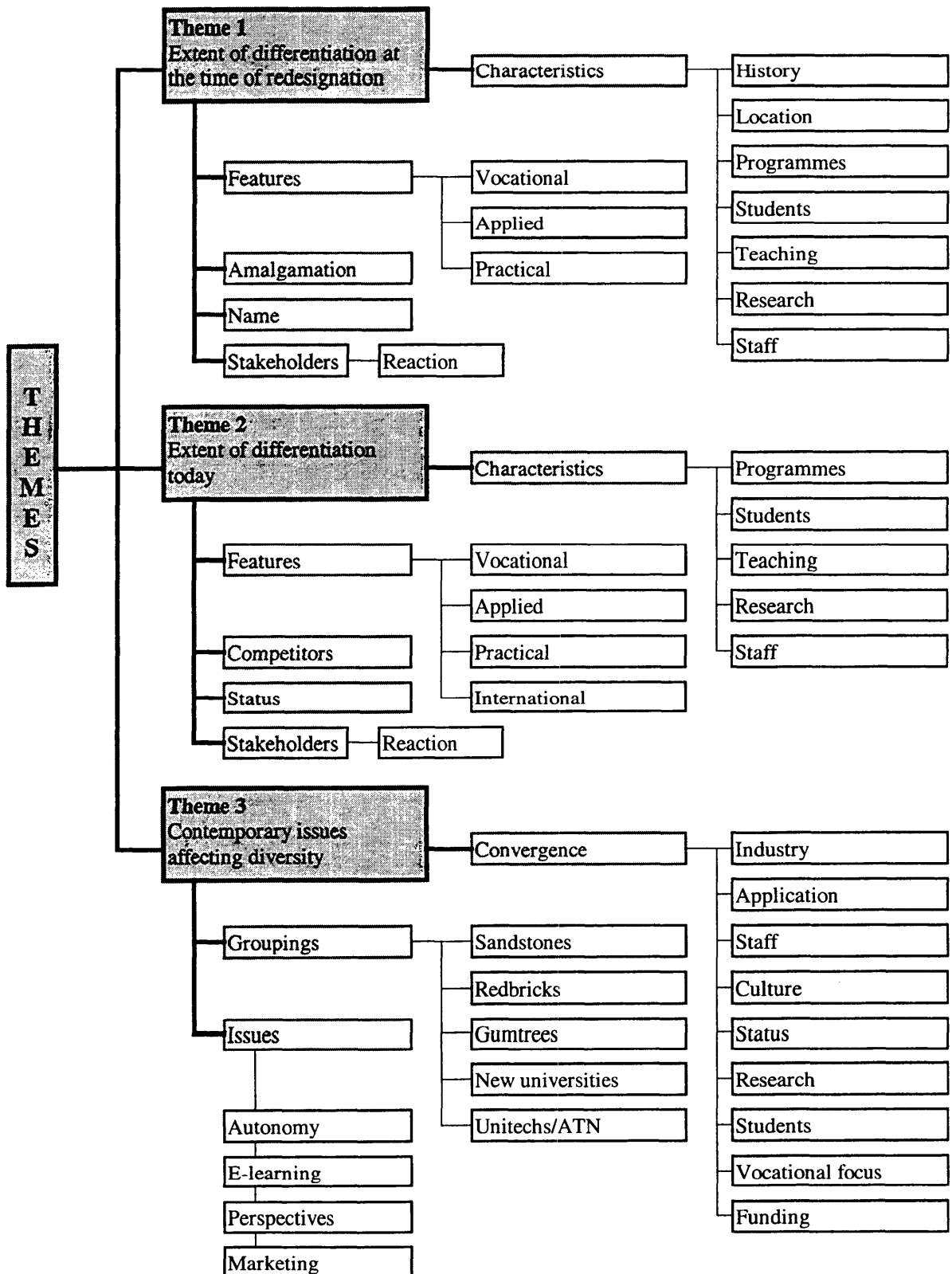


ILLUSTRATION 1: QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Background

The former Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT) had its origins in technical and teacher education in Queensland when the Brisbane School of Arts was established in 1849. It was established as a College of Advanced Education (CAE) in 1965 and became one of the central institutes of technology that emerged in the capital cities of each of the Australian states. By the 1980s QIT was offering both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. QIT became Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in 1989. Shortly after redesignation, in 1990, Brisbane College of Advanced Education amalgamated with QUT to form a large multi-campus university which now has over 30,000 students, ten percent of whom are from overseas.

Queensland University of Technology has three Brisbane campuses, one of which is in the heart of Brisbane's central business district, which together offer more than 130 undergraduate and postgraduate courses in eight major discipline areas, namely: Arts, Built Environment and Engineering, Business, Education, Health, Information Technology, Law and Science (Queensland University of Technology 1998a).

The mission and goals of QUT are presented in Table 5.1.

The Interviews

Theme 1 The extent to which diversity and differentiation were central to QUT at the time of redesignation, and the manifestation of that differentiation at that time.

The desire to be distinctive as a new university and to differentiate itself from the existing universities in Brisbane, namely the University of Queensland (UQ) and Griffith University (GU), was clearly a priority for QUT at the time of redesignation. Significantly, it was recognised that little, if any, change was needed to achieve this.

QIT was ‘already fairly well differentiated in the market’ (Coaldrake, 18³) and ‘was marked by its own history and presence’ (Gardiner, 11).

Table 5.1 The Mission and Goals of Queensland University of Technology (from Queensland University of Technology, 1998)

<p style="text-align: center;">Mission</p> <p>The mission of QUT is to bring to the community the benefits of teaching, research, technology and service.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Goals</p> <p>1. Teaching and Learning To ensure that QUT graduates possess knowledge, professional competence, a sense of community responsibility, and a capacity to continue their professional and personal development throughout their lives.</p> <p>2. Research To advance and apply knowledge germane to the professions and to the communities with which QUT interacts and relevant to the enhancement of economic, cultural and social conditions.</p> <p>3. Community service To contribute to the development of Australia’s international responsibility and competitiveness, to enhance QUT’s relationship with the professions, and to increase community awareness of issues through professional service and social commentary.</p>
--

Dennis Gibson, as Director of the former QIT and the inaugural Vice Chancellor of the new university, is clear that differentiation was both important and already in place.

...we saw ourselves in those initial few moments as distinctive in terms of the history of the place, as a technological institute, geographically in the middle of the town. So history and geography really impacted on what we saw as our future.
(Gibson, 6)

History and location were therefore central to the new university’s distinctiveness; history in terms of the institution’s 24 years as an institute of technology with an overt applied, work-related mission, and location in terms of the inner city site of its major Garden Point campus, which placed it in close proximity to the business and professional communities it served.

³ The numerical reference following the interviewee’s name after each quotation refers to the QSR NUD*IST text unit from the relevant coded interview transcript.

There were other important manifestations of the new university's distinctiveness, however. Teaching was seen to be of good quality, and the new university had a 'much higher proportion of academic staff that worked in industry than a traditional university' (Coaldrake, 40). In addition, the new university had a distinctive student population comprising a much larger proportion of older, part-time students than a traditional university. This resulted in a particular pattern of attendance and study.

60% of our intake was mature aged students...so we were already in life-long learning before that was a discrete pedagogical term of great note...and this campus in the middle of town had the night shift and the day shift and the reality was we were bringing [education] to multiple groups connected with the workplace from day one. (Gardiner, 42)

Underpinning these specific manifestations of QUT's distinctiveness at the time of redesignation was recognition of the applied nature of its education and its close connections with industry and the professions. This was well summed up by Gardiner.

We were a different institution. We were located downtown and even for those that were not technology based, they were in the middle of town, so the applied nature of what we were doing was in itself a bringing of something to somebody, a direct connectiveness that was not ivory tower fundamental pure research or pure whatever else. We were bringing it to the people, in the fact that our student population itself also manifested something other than school kids going to uni for the first time. (Gardiner, 41)

The one aspect of the new QUT which did require some specific attention with respect to differentiation was that of research. As Dennis Gibson saw it, 'in terms of research it's slightly different in that we were starting from zero' (Gibson, 40). In fact, QIT did engage in a modest amount of research before redesignation, but, significantly, it was not government-funded for this activity. According to Gardiner,

... the reality was that we were doing research, and since we didn't have any government funding, we tended to do it off somebody else's money, and that tended to be business and industry. (Gardiner, 27)

Developing that modest research base as a new university became an important policy issue. It was recognised that QUT should not aspire to match the pure research mission

of the traditional university, and should build on its applied research base. This required a new research 'selectivity and concentration' policy,

... which was accepting that we'd have no prospect of being an omnibus research university, a comprehensive research university in the way that a sandstone was with 50 to 100 years of history behind it, but that we could make moves in the research and development market in a certain number of areas. (Coaldrake, 29)

A potentially confounding aspect of QUT's determined distinctiveness, built as it was on its history as a central institute of technology, was the immediate decision to amalgamate with the Brisbane College of Advanced Education (BCAE). This was completed within eighteen months of redesignation, and added a dimension to the new university's distinctiveness which might have been destabilising. However, it is apparent that rather than dilute QUT's applied image, the addition of new disciplines such as education, performing arts and the social sciences was seen as making the university a truly multi-disciplinary institution while still maintaining its visible commitment to applied and professionally based education.

As the inaugural Vice Chancellor of the new university, Dennis Gibson, saw it;

... within weeks of becoming a university we went into a big merger exercise with the College of Advanced Education which had an Education faculty and a strong Arts and Social Sciences focus, so within a year and four months of becoming a university we were suddenly twice the size with twice the range of disciplines, and we became a much broader-based institution with just about every discipline outside medicine and veterinary. (Gibson, 7)

He was clear that this didn't dilute the new university's distinctiveness because 'we found that the important parts of the College...were education and performing arts, and they both had a very strong professional focus. So the professional focus of the institution continued' (Gibson, 12). This was reinforced by the perception that 'after the amalgamation there was a much closer connectiveness with local business, industry and the professions, and an applied nature even though we weren't supposed to do research' (Gardiner, 27). Interestingly, market research at the time of redesignation that was directed at city professionals provided three messages for the new university. The

first was ‘this is our institution and we’re really pleased it’s become a university’, a sort of ownership and pride. The second was that they’re excited about the change and seeing what they’ve got to do next, and the third was fear that we would become like any other university’ (Gibson, 47).

The most powerful manifestation of the distinctive nature of QUT as a new university, and its desire to build on its established reputation as an institute of technology, came with the decision to name the new university Queensland University of Technology. The transition from QIT to QUT was, on paper, clean, clear and simple. The decision was not without debate, however, and initially there were some detractors, especially amongst those disciplines, such as law, for which the ‘technology’ label had no immediate affinity. According to David Gardiner, who was Dean of the Faculty of Law at the time of redesignation,

... the name change from ‘institute of technology’ to ‘university of technology’ got a lot of challenging dialogue around that time with a diversity of disciplines, including business and law and arts; and with the continued use of the word ‘technology’, there was a big argument about whether we should have become, not that it would be distinctive in any way, but that we might be the University of Brisbane, just as you have the University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne.... There were debates about whether being a second or third string ‘university’ in a town was good enough, and what else was distinctive about us. I suppose we could have been the University of Brisbane with an applied mission, whatever that means. (Gardiner, 12)

In the end, after ‘a period when everyone was let out of their cages, ...the decision to move from QIT to QUT was a very straightforward one. ...The fact that it was well accepted was an indication of that’ (Coaldrake, 78).

Theme 2 The extent to which QUT has retained its differentiation since redesignation, and the current manifestation of that differentiation.

Eleven years after QUT became a university, there remains a strong commitment to the elements of its makeup on which its distinctiveness was initially established. The development of the university’s byline, ‘University for the Real World’, in the early

1990's, and its ongoing utilisation, is a tangible indication that QUT has maintained its original focus. According to Dennis Gibson, '...we dreamt up this logo 'University for the Real World', and we've lived with that for ten years and everybody's bought into it, so I think we've managed to retain our distinctiveness, ...it is a powerful message that's really well understood.' (Gibson, 13, 28) In more recent times there have been variations: 'real graduates for real whatever, the word real is always there' (Gardiner, 59). Interestingly, there was a fleeting response from one of QUT's competitors, which indicated the keenness with which they wished to be seen as distinctive and different to QUT. As Gardiner observed, 'the sandstone automatically as we were saying "the university for the real world", were saying "the real university for the world"' (Gardiner, 59). This reactive form of promotion did not last long, however.

While there is a clear belief that QUT has remained true to its applied vocational purpose, the extent to which QUT has maintained its distinctiveness is less certain. There are indications 'that the traditional universities have moved to promote themselves as "real world"' (Gibson, 54) and that the University of Queensland, in particular, has, over the last ten years 'become more like QUT' (Coaldrake, 121). The distinctiveness of QUT's 'applied' mission has therefore become

... increasingly difficult to maintain as other players have caught up in the advantages of connectiveness with professions and industries. They're all doing it as well, so to say we are different is harder. QUT was different at one point but others, including sandstones, have picked it up and they can see the advantages of running with it. (Gardiner, 36)

Notwithstanding this discernible shift in the focus of QUT's competitors, QUT itself has maintained a strong belief in the characteristics that it established as an institute of technology and which became the backbone of its distinctiveness at the time of redesignation. At the heart of these characteristics is the notion of application. QUT has remained 'an applied institution throughout, and that's able to be maintained in a managerial sense and a structural sense by reaffirming it all the time. We don't have another debate about it' (Gardiner, 93). Exactly what 'applied' means today is best addressed by a review of the wide range of its manifestations.

In terms of students, the applied mission is reflected in the make-up of the student population. QUT has retained a quite different student profile to UQ, and

... the patterns of enrolments in the two places are very different, with UQ having 80% of its undergraduates school leavers, and 20% other. QUT has 60% other and 40% school leavers. It's a very different pattern. QUT gets a lot of TAFE transfers, mature age entry, people who have entry on a basis of other higher education experience and so on. (Gibson, 61)

This distinctive mix of students is reflected in the attendance pattern, with QUT retaining a significantly higher proportion of part-time students and a strong second semester intake, which UQ 'can't compete with because they're into the school leaver market' (Gibson, 62).

Significantly, however, the part-time student population at QUT has shifted in character.

The part-time student population used to comprise people who didn't have degrees, who worked in government, who worked in commerce and needed a degree in order to progress their careers. Now that group of people is joined in the part-time student population by what the Americans call the 'earner-learners', and those people are here because they wish to refresh or re-accredit, and a lot of them are more interested in certification than they are in graduation. (Coaldrake, 47)

A large proportion of the latter group of students are studying at the postgraduate level, which is a significant change from the enrolment profile of the university at redesignation. Of the 5000 or so current postgraduate students, over 4000 are doing coursework, frequently part-time, 'so they're people in mid-career and that's the area where we start to see big competition because of external delivery and that's so hard. That's where you get competition from the non-Brisbane universities' (Gibson, 68). In summary, the current student population of QUT has 'significant diversities in postgraduate - undergraduate balance and then there is diversity in terms of commitment to things like low SES and social diversity' (Gibson, 102).

The applied focus of QUT is also apparent in the form of its programmes. QUT has a deliberate policy not to compete in the general arts degree market, because 'we would be cleaned up in the general market by UQ and Griffith' (Coaldrake, 151). Deliberately, QUT 'runs programmes which have labels about them' (Coaldrake, 152), such that QUT 'is the leading university in terms of professionals, in terms of accreditation issues for various professional bodies...and the biggest player in this town in the postgraduate coursework market, and more broadly, in the corporate education arena' (Coaldrake, 95). Coaldrake, in fact, regards QUT as the 'university for professionals' (Coaldrake, 95)

A further manifestation of the applied nature of QUT is visible in its relationship with key stakeholders, which hasn't changed 'in that sense of the branding and the substance behind the branding of what we are, what our mission is...[but] for historical reasons is a bit shakier to maintain with some of the stakeholders' (Gardiner, 103). While QUT has continued to value its business, industry and professional partners, there is a sense that the original stakeholders who were so supportive of the change to university status in the early 1990s may not now be central to stakeholder support. As Gardiner puts it, 'I think there's been a conversion issue between our old genuinely supporting stakeholders and a new generation of those people' (Gardiner, 105). Coaldrake goes further and suggests that there has actually been a shift in the makeup of the key stakeholders for the university, believing that 'QUT is much more the university for professions than it is the university for industry...if you look at the serious industry R and D funding in this town, for example, the University of Queensland is the serious industry university in terms of its linkages' (Coaldrake, 88, 93). If this is indeed the case, it is a further indication of the convergence that has occurred since 1990 as UQ has promoted a more applied mission.

The nature of academic staff at QUT is a further point of differentiation which reflects the applied focus of the university. In contrast to UQ and Griffith University, QUT has continued to emphasise the importance of currency of practice for its staff, as well as academic currency. According to Gardiner, 'we don't want to populate [the university]

teaching staff entirely with PhDs in nappies. We actually want people who understand industry as well.' (Gardiner, 45)

Finally, QUT has steadily developed its profile as a serious player in the research field, with a growing reputation for the quantity and quality of its applied research, as manifest by its success with industry-focused SPIRT grants. While, at the time of redesignation, QUT might have considered the applied research field its own, there is no doubt that competitor universities are now also very active in the applied research area, seeing it as a fruitful source of research dollars. As Dennis Gibson puts it, 'I don't think there's any doubt that the traditional universities have moved to promote themselves as "real world", and in a research sense the successful research universities are successful in both pure research and applied research' (Gibson, 54).

While the research activity of QUT has undoubtedly grown dramatically over the eleven years since redesignation, postgraduate student research is still a small proportion of their output and, overall, QUT does not promote itself as a 'research university'. But there remains some debate about the role that research has to play. In simple terms, on the one hand QUT could remain a 'teaching university' and continue to promote applied research and ongoing partnership with business and industry. On the other hand, it could actively grow its pure research base, and progressively move to become a 'research university'. The former path would retain an important point of differentiation for the university relative to its immediate competitors, but might raise questions about the underpinning scholarship of research. The latter path would satisfy the need for underpinning scholarship, but would result in a loss of distinctiveness, and a resultant ranking as number two or three amongst what would become three similar universities in Brisbane. As Gardiner puts it,

... we are a teaching only university, we are not a comprehensive research university. ...What does that mean for research and what does the apparent absence of a visible research base do to the underpinning scholarship of your teaching and international teaching? It actually may impede for marketing and other reasons your capacity to be a teaching university or at least remove the options or flexibility you may have. (Gardiner, 180)

Theme 3 The impact of the political, funding and market environment of higher education on diversity in the system as a whole and on the differentiation of QUT and its neighbouring institutions.

Overall, the extent of institutional diversity in Australia perhaps depends on one's viewpoint. From an international perspective, looking at the system as a whole, the diversity may not appear great. As Gardiner puts it: 'I think if you're from the outside and you look at the sale of Australian universities to the market, whether it be an international student market or an investment market through R and D, they all look the same' (Gardiner, 157). The reason for this apparent lack of diversity in the system as a whole is reflected on by Coaldrake.

The reason diversity hasn't been achieved is because we've got a one garden variety funding model and we've got 38 universities all with strategic plans that look the same, a situation derived from the funding model. (Coaldrake, 158)

When the Australian higher education system is viewed from within, the picture is perhaps a little different. The universities can be placed into groups which apparently reflect discernible differences between them. Some of these groups⁴, such as the 'sandstones' and the Australian Technology Network (ATN), appear to have operational substance in that their member institutions meet together to discuss issues of common interest. Other groupings, such as the 'wannabees' or the 'gumtrees', are less tangible, and exist only as theoretical groupings that are occasionally useful in discussions such as this. Arguably, universities from these groups have greater difficulty promoting their distinctiveness. As Coaldrake comments, 'the so-called "gumtrees", the Macquaries, the LaTrobres, the Griffiths have some very good quality embedded inside them...but they've got a more ambivalent profile in the market place and that is a real issue for them to deal with' (Coaldrake, 67).

The 'sandstones' and 'redbricks', the group of eight more traditional universities in Australia, can be differentiated from the other universities in terms of their research,

⁴ For a more comprehensive description and discussion of these groupings, refer to Chapter 4 of this study.

their wealth and, by and large, their antiquity. They have ‘massive great histories behind them, and medical schools... sometimes they’re sleeping giants, and sometimes you just have to shake the tree and it just all falls out and that’s the reality of their funding base’ (Gardiner, 134). Similarly, the ‘technologies’, the former central institutes of technology that are now members of the ATN, can also be differentiated, but for different reasons. These relatively new universities form a group which ‘is distinctive in terms of its history and its placement and its size (Gardiner, 165). As Dennis Gibson puts it,

... the common things they have are one - history, two - geography. I mean there is a huge difference between the big metropolitan universities and being a regional university. And I do think there’s a commonality of mission in terms of what we see as our major job, you know, providing people for the world of work, we share that in common. And the other thing we’ve got in common is there’s only one of us per state and we basically don’t compete with each other. (Gibson, 108)

There would appear to be no doubt that, notwithstanding a clear perception that there has been a convergence of missions and priorities amongst Australian universities, institutions belonging in particular to the ‘group of eight’ or to the ATN would see themselves as quite distinctive from one another, and further would not like to see that distinctiveness lost.

In other words, looking from the outside, there would appear to be a superficial homogeneity amongst Australian universities, while looking at these same universities from within the system, a picture of at least some differentiation occurs amongst groups of similar institutions. However, when the viewpoint is from within an individual university, the perception of distinctiveness is sharpened still further.

When you go outside, they all look the same. When you’re inside, we all have so many differences in geography, size, mission, history, financial capacities and everything else. I think we accentuate internally the differences when in fact, on a global scale, there’s a great homogeneity of the Australian higher education system. (Gardiner, 158)

This raises the problematic issue of how institutional diversity is actually defined. On the one hand, it could be defined from the outside looking in, which could be regarded as the stakeholder perspective of diversity, or, on the other hand, from the inside looking out, which could be seen as the institutional perspective of diversity. Where these two perspectives overlap is in the advertising and promotion arena. QUT, for instance, has 'maintained the press image of being distinctive, but how distinctive it is in substance is another question' (Gardiner, 78). There are also aspects of distinctiveness that are fundamental to an institution and therefore endure, and others that are manufactured. 'The things which make them distinctive, what they are and what they have been, as distinct from them saying how they are distinctive, I think is very hard to change' (Gardiner, 69).

Whether or not diversity in Australian education is greater or less than it was before the Dawkins' reforms is one thing, but whether there should be significant diversity in the system is another. According to Coaldrake, from the QUT perspective,

... the West Report has been the signal to the sector that there was a need for institutions to differentiate themselves and their products. I think we already knew that and I say that there were no surprises in West for us. But a lot of institutions that don't have a clear identity are very vulnerable in the market place. (Coaldrake, 64)

From a system perspective, the need for individual institutional diversity may not be so significant. Gardiner questions

... whether you need diversity or not from economic grounds. Do you spread a lot over everything or do you concentrate? ...In infrastructure and research areas, how many medical schools, how many classical Greek schools do you need? From a global competitive point of view, is it more desirable to have diversity so you have some peaks and the rest is amorphous? ...One suspects that you would need both, you need a strong total system to be competitive and not just a select few. (Gardiner, 177, 178)

Overall, the need for diversity, for whatever complex set of reasons and from whatever perspectives it is viewed, is accepted and advocated. Vice Chancellor Dennis Gibson sums it up.

The world is dynamic and turbulent and it's not ordered. It is turbulent, and you know, diversity is good for the system. On occasions it may frustrate governments that two or three universities are trying to do similar sorts of things, but I do think the issue of universities not being able to work together is overplayed. There is a lot of shared stuff between universities, but yes I think diversity is absolutely essential. (Gibson, 119)

Summary

From the perspective of its senior managers, Queensland University of Technology was a distinctive institution amongst its immediate competitors in Brisbane, well before it was redesignated as a university. It therefore became a new university which was well connected to its origins as an established institute of technology. It had a distinctive purpose, a strong history and a central city location that kept it in the prime view of its key stakeholders: business, industry and the professions. Its post-redesignation merger with the Brisbane College of Advanced Education did not diminish this focus and in fact helped to establish the new university as a genuinely comprehensive institution.

At the heart of its purpose was its focus on applied vocational education for a student body comprising a significant number of non-traditional students who were older, and part-time. This was in sharp contrast to the University of Queensland, which as a traditional 'sandstone' university, had a very high proportion of full-time school leavers amongst its first year enrolments. QUT also emphasised teaching ahead of research, acknowledging that the latter was in its infancy, but quickly put in place a research policy promoting selectivity and concentration in areas of genuine potential. A further point of distinction was the make-up of the academic staff, most of whom had work experience in the areas in which they taught.

The new university's primary stakeholders were members of the Brisbane's business and professional community who had given support to the earlier institute of technology

and, at the time of redesignation, harboured some concern that redesignation might see the loss of this institution's vocational and applied focus. It was clear that the leaders of the university at that time were determined that this critical point of distinctiveness would not be lost, thus the decision to retain 'technology' in the name, and call the new university 'Queensland University of Technology' in preference to, say, 'Brisbane University'.

Eleven years later, the prevailing feeling is that QUT has remained true to its purpose, and is still distinctive. However, there is an equally clear feeling that this distinctiveness is less obvious than it was in the early 1990s, largely because of the tendencies of both the University of Queensland and Griffith University to shift their focus to a more applied one, and to therefore converge with QUT's vocational purpose. That is not to say that QUT does not display some converging tendencies of its own. Certainly, the research efforts of the university, while still predominantly applied, have become closer to those of the traditional universities as they themselves have moved to embrace a more applied research mission. The impact of flexible learning, and in particular e-learning, also has a converging impact, providing opportunities for universities previously unable to compete for a particular market to duplicate the successful delivery of other universities, and thus gain market share.

There would appear to have been a subtle shift in stakeholder support for QUT that is probably a consequence of the overt move of the University of Queensland to seek, and gain, industry support for its research. Rather than remain the university for industry, a position it claimed in the early 1990s, and which is now arguably UQ's domain, QUT is perhaps now more accurately perceived as the university for professionals, given its strength in professional qualifications and postgraduate coursework tailored to the needs of the working professional. There has therefore been a shift in the ground pegged out by the major competitors as they strive to retain and grow market share. This has resulted in more overlap, but not wholesale duplication.

Looking more broadly at the higher education system, the extent of diversity amongst Australia's universities is considered to depend on one's perspective. From an international perspective, the system, in broadest detail, would be seen as homogeneous, with all of the universities looking much the same. From a national perspective, a picture of differentiation between different types of university, such as the 'group of eight' or the ATN universities, emerges. From an internal institutional perspective, an individual university appears quite distinctive in terms of the details of its structure and functions.

Overall, there was general agreement that there has been significant convergence amongst Australian universities since the Dawkins reforms of 1987. There was also agreement that this was more a result of the movement of the traditional universities towards the applied mission of the universities of technology, than the reverse. One of the key drivers for this convergence was considered to be the standard funding model which promotes uniform strategic responses from the universities.

ILLUSTRATION 2: ROYAL MELBOURNE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Background

RMIT was founded in 1887 as the Melbourne Working Men's College. Since that time it has changed its name to become the Melbourne Technical College in 1934, the Royal Melbourne Technical College in 1954, and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1960. In the latter form it became one of the central institutes of technology established in the capital cities of each Australian state. RMIT was granted formal university status in 1992.

RMIT has merged with several other educational institutions - notably the Emily McPherson College in the 1970s and the Phillip Institute of Technology in 1992. These institutions are now part of RMIT University, which has around 45,000 students in Melbourne, including 5500 international students, plus a significant number of students studying at campuses outside Australia. The vision, mission and values of RMIT University are presented in Table 5.2.

The Interviews

Theme 1 The extent to which diversity and differentiation were central to RMIT at the time of redesignation, and the manifestation of that differentiation at that time.

When RMIT moved to university status in 1992, it made a conscious and deliberate decision to maintain and, ideally, enhance the direction it had forged and the reputation it had acquired as an institute of technology. 'What it chose to do was to confirm what it believed its mission was about, the reputation that it had acquired over the years. It wanted to reaffirm that very strongly' (Pugh, 6⁵). According to David Beanland, who was director of RMIT immediately before redesignation, and the inaugural vice chancellor of the new university:

⁵ The numerical reference following the interviewee's name after each quotation refers to the QSR NUD*IST text unit from the relevant coded interview transcript.

Table 5.2 The Vision, Mission and Values of RMIT University (from RMIT University, 2000)

<p style="text-align: center;">Vision</p> <p>The Future RMIT University will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• be a recognised world leader amongst universities that are multi-level, globally focused, diverse, student-centred, industry relevant and client and community responsive;• deliver programs ranging from certificate level vocational programs through tailored programs for industry and community clients, in Australia and offshore, to diploma, bachelor, masters degree (coursework and research) and doctoral research programs;• have graduates with excellent employment opportunities in areas relevant to the sophisticated global society of the new century, who provide leadership in a rapidly changing global community, have a desire for lifelong learning, and a strong affinity for RMIT;• have an international reputation for the quality and practical orientation of its courseware, the outcomes of its applied research and development activities, and its contributions to community development;• be the Australian leader in international education, with students from many countries studying at RMIT in Melbourne, and in the University's developing campuses throughout Asia;• be renowned for forming innovative, creative and flexible partnerships with industry, the community and other educational institutions in teaching and learning, applied and interdisciplinary research programs (especially through the University's research institutes and centres), international education, and community development;• be the Australian leader in the use of information and communications technology in the design and flexible delivery of innovative education, training and research programs, and in the provision of quality client-focused management, learning support, administrative and student services;• be a community of some 55,000 students, including 15,000 offshore, and 3000 staff drawn from an enormous variety of cultural, racial, linguistic and religious backgrounds who study or work in an environment which:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• creates challenging learning opportunities that enable students to realise their full potential;• supports lifelong learning, creativity, practicality, a global imagination and ongoing professional development;• encourages participation in decision making and openness and co-operation in university relations;• celebrates diversity, and is stimulating, co-operative, and safe;• has clearly defined responsibilities and accountabilities for staff and rewards excellent performance;• comprises a number of local and international campuses, known for their distinctive areas of excellence in teaching and research, and interaction with the environment and the community. <p style="text-align: center;">Mission</p> <p>RMIT University exists to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide technical and professional education that develops people for leadership and employment; and• undertake research programs that address real world issues within an international and community context. <p style="text-align: center;">Values</p> <p>The values that will characterise RMIT as an organisation, and will be embraced by both staff and students of the University are: client focus, quality, practicality and relevance, global imagination, cultural diversity, fairness to all, innovation and enterprise, environmental care, learning and personal growth, ethical behaviour and responsibility, technological/professional orientation.</p>

... the intention would never have been to change our profile or our educational focus, because that had been developed with some thought right through the 70s and 80s. RMIT was clearly a place where the programmes led to employment at what ever levels appropriate to the programme...and so part of the decision was saying “this is the expertise that we have, this is the outlook we have, we want to stay in this area”. ...There was certainly no attempt to move to having an identical position to the established universities. (Beanland, 6)

Significantly, this decision to maintain the institution on its well-established path was clearly based on the fact that it had a history of success in following this direction and had a well-established reputation to sustain. It was not predicated on an overt decision to adopt this particular mission as a university so that it would be distinctive. As Pugh puts it: ‘I don’t know that RMIT deliberately sought to be different’ (Pugh, 6). The differentiation that existed between RMIT university and other universities was the result of this primary decision, not the reason for it.

Having said that, there was still a strong feeling that RMIT would not be (just) another traditional university. According to Beanland, ‘we really disregarded the trappings of a traditional university quite early...and said that the traditional model is very largely a handicap’ (Beanland, 34). Still, the university label was clearly very important to the institution because ‘you couldn’t get serious industry support or public support for the groups that weren’t in the university sector’ (Beanland, 5).

There is a certain irony in the fact that RMIT clearly saw the benefits of being a university, but was, initially, quite diffident about publicising its new status. At the heart of its dilemma was the decision on the name of the new university. Prior to redesignation, RMIT was one of only a few education institutions in Australia to have been accorded the ‘Royal’ title, a privilege it cherished. If it had attempted to change its name to, say, ‘Royal Melbourne University of Technology’ (RMUT), it would have had to sacrifice the ‘Royal’ prefix, and the resulting name would have been uncomfortably close to that of Melbourne University. It would also have had a rather

unfortunate acronym. In the end, the institution chose not to change its formal name at all, and has remained RMIT. According to Beanland,

First we did not allow 'university' to be used. ...We were strictly operating on Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology; RMIT. But we did allow it to be used as RMIT University overseas to clarify the fact that it was a university, and that allowed us to maintain the view that nothing had changed. (Beanland, 60)

So the issue to be dealt with, according to Beanland, was not whether RMIT was a distinctive university, but rather whether it was a university at all, and RMIT decided that it was more important to emphasise that RMIT was 'continuing its usual business' (Beanland, 61) than becoming a university with the implication that that might mean some kind of change to its mission. Progressively, the new university has moved to use the word 'university' in its title, without changing its formal name. 'RMIT' therefore remains the formal name, and 'RMIT University' is registered as the logo.

The heart of the distinctiveness of RMIT at the time of redesignation, even if it had not been deliberately sought, was manifest in the clearly visible commitment to being 'employment-related and practical, with a strong technical base and a broad scope of programmes' (Beanland, 28). According to Pugh, 'RMIT came from a strong base of engineering and science, but there was also a broad base of other disciplines' (Pugh, 48), and this was the basis for its reputation as a technology-based institution, although the definition of technology has been broadened over the years.

This accent on technology resulted in strong industry connections, but as David Beanland comments, 'in reality they were nowhere near as good as they were thought to be, but it was still an advantage' (Beanland, 33). Students were choosing RMIT as their first preference because of 'its relevance, its practical skills, its ability to [help students] acquire knowledge and not just learn about it, and its connection to employment' (Beanland, 66). Student support was also a feature of the institution. 'There's always been a spirit of helping the students, there's a very strong commitment to the service ethic' (Beanland, 33). In part this appeared through the structure of RMIT's academic

programmes, which were designed to meet the needs of a part-time student population.

David Pugh sums it up:

Students saw [RMIT] as something that was going to give them a kind of education which would fit them for their careers. We didn't have anything like an attractive campus. We didn't have the facilities to attract them. So what was it? It was about the nature of the programmes that were being offered. Some were sandwich courses, for example. Or it was exposure to the kind of dedicated staff that were there. There was still a genuine concern for the teaching as well as the research side of things. (Pugh, 118)

The research undertaken at RMIT prior to and at the time of redesignation was certainly different from that taking place at existing universities in Melbourne at that time. RMIT's research was almost all applied and industry related. This was particularly evident in the appointment of new staff.

When we were engaging new staff, initially we always were very strongly emphasising the industrial and business connection...we made it very clear, and said 'if it's about doing your own thing, on the research end of things, there's an institution 800 metres up the road and I suggest that you go there, because here we can't enjoy that luxury'. (Pugh, 100, 101)

RMIT placed an emphasis on interdisciplinary research and on application, but not exclusively so. The institution acknowledged very early in its research history that there was a place for 'not necessarily blue sky, but pure research...that we could then convert into the applied side of things' (Pugh, 102).

Typical of its counterparts in the capital cities of other states of Australia, RMIT also gained distinctiveness through its inner-city location that gave it direct access to the business, professional and industry stakeholders that it served, and from the fact that, in various guises, it had existed as an education provider in Melbourne for a long time and had a rich history on which to base its reputation.

Theme 2 The extent to which RMIT has retained its differentiation since redesignation, and the current manifestation of that differentiation.

Nine years after redesignation, RMIT has firmly established itself as a highly regarded university, both locally and internationally. According to David Beanland,

... the acceptability of RMIT has gone up dramatically. One, because it's a university and also because it is performing, and the most clear indicator of that is that the leaders in the community who all had their education at Melbourne [University], because there was no other university, are all now prepared to send their kids to RMIT. (Beanland, 67)

The reason for this, according to Beanland, is that RMIT has stuck to its mission, based on work-related applied education. In the final analysis he believes that there is a very common view that 'if you know what you want to be, go to RMIT, if you don't know what you want to be, go to Melbourne' (Beanland, 77). Programmes at RMIT are all specialised with clear outcomes. This applied approach is not only striking a chord with students, it has also gained increasing acceptance from employers. One large national corporate will now 'only recruit from RMIT for the first four weeks and will take every student it can get. After that it starts to recruit from other universities' (Beanland, 82).

According to both Beanland and Pugh, student first preferences for RMIT have risen significantly over the last ten years. Without hesitation, this is put down to the strong employment focus of RMIT programmes, and the high employability of its graduates. According to one parent who had sent all four of his children to RMIT 'when they go along to get a job and say they come from RMIT, they get the job, end of story' (Beanland, 84). This work focus is seen as a critical point of differentiation from other universities. As Beanland puts it, 'one of our values for students is employability, but that's not a value in most other universities' (Beanland, 117).

This aspect of RMIT's reputation is particularly evident in the international market place, where the university has established itself as a leader amongst Australian universities. In this environment it is word of mouth that is critically important in

promoting RMIT's distinctiveness as a university, because, according to Beanland, 'if you're going to go to another country to study, you're going to find out whether it's a good place to go or not, so people ask around and if they don't know anybody who has been there, they won't go' (Beanland, 100). Size is therefore a critical differentiator, because the greater the number of successful graduate students, the larger the pool of anecdotal information from which intending students can draw.

RMIT's distinctiveness has resulted in changes to its student population over the years since redesignation. According to Pugh, 'in the past [RMIT] might have been attracting students who were second chance perhaps. This has gone by the board. It now attracts students of all shapes, sizes and abilities...who feel that the educational process they are exposed to is going to give them a hands-on as well as an intellectual capability and an edge to their careers' (Pugh, 145). RMIT is therefore attracting far more first-choice school leavers, particularly those who see the opportunities for life-long learning through the university. Pugh also believes that students now choose RMIT because 'it has developed programmes in concert with the business world and industry by actually taking programmes into the workplace. That's another characteristic that distinguishes it' (Pugh, 152).

In a similar way, the staff profile has also changed over the years since redesignation, and provides a less distinct point of differentiation from other universities. Professor Beanland believes that, in terms of recruitment, 'the discrimination is still a bit ad hoc. We would still take them from Melbourne, or from other universities of tradition, and they would still take ours, depending on the field and background' (Beanland, 135). However, he is adamant that once employed at RMIT, staff have a clear responsibility to align with the university's mission. 'We're pretty clear that we have got a corporate purpose, and if you're signing on, you're not just free to do what you'd like' (Beanland, 135). David Pugh shares this view, commenting that as far as the staff profile is concerned, 'the differential is less acute than it was' (Pugh, 157). He is mindful of the increasing number of staff being recruited from a traditional but narrow career path of school to university study to university employment, and believes that this

... has to be managed because we don't want to be seen to be moving away from the strengths that we believed were distinctive, and those were the strengths of people who could be with students as their guide, as mentors, who've actually been out and done things. So I think the profile is changing, but I still think that it is a distinctive difference. (Pugh, 157)

RMIT deals with this issue by having 'different sorts of promotional criteria, different sorts of ways of operating that are team-oriented and not individual, [and by being] multi-disciplinary not single disciplinary' (Beanland, 151). It also has very well developed quality systems and a culture of continuous improvement which embodies 'all those sorts of things which a traditional university wouldn't have a bar of' (Beanland, 151).

Another prominent area of institutional distinctiveness is research. Both David Beanland, as the Vice Chancellor for the last ten years, and David Pugh, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research, for much of this period, are insistent that RMIT's research focus is significantly different to that of the more traditional universities. According to the Vice Chancellor, RMIT is concerned with 'research problems that don't come from the staff's ideas necessarily, but are supported by someone else - someone else values the work, wants it done and sees a way of using it' (Beanland, 118). By contrast RMIT does not support 'research that's going to produce three esoteric papers in a high-falutin journal because a staff member has done all these detailed experiments and knows now that you can do this one and this one and no one else in the world is concerned about it' (Beanland, 118).

Beanland insists that this approach to research is much harder than that of traditional universities who allow staff more latitude to do personal research, and 'that's why there aren't so many universities like us' (Beanland, 119). He contends that it is easier for staff to work on their own problems than someone else's, but that getting staff committed to the latter is what 'makes the difference between the new model university and the old. The old is much easier. The staff aren't accountable' (Beanland, 119).

Notwithstanding this sharp distinction, RMIT is not above using some of the trappings of the 'old' university, such as the title 'professor'. However, the Vice Chancellor, while acknowledging that the title is valuable in giving university experts external credibility, points out that RMIT's criteria for appointment to professorial status are significantly different to those of a traditional university. 'We've got professors appointed who'd never get to be professors in other universities...if you have diversity you have to have different sorts of criteria' (Beanland, 150). He illustrates this position by reference to a professor of gold and silver smithing at RMIT 'that would be pretty hard to contemplate [in a traditional university]', and recognises that 'being this different sort of institution does require people to think it through because the patterns on it are not as well established' (Beanland, 150).

Theme 3 The impact of the political, funding and market environment of higher education on diversity in the system as a whole and on the differentiation of RMIT and its neighbouring institutions.

In spite of the strong belief that RMIT has remained true to its mission over the last ten years, there are clear signs that the differentiation between the modern 'university of technology' and the traditional university is less than it was ten years ago. David Pugh comments that while 'students would see RMIT as much more innovative and entrepreneurial in its activities, ...Melbourne [University] is becoming much more in that way. In fact all universities are having to move in that direction' (Pugh, 146). Similarly in the research area, 'the traditional universities are swinging much more to applied research' (Beanland, 116). However, the convergence is not generated entirely by the realignment of traditional universities. RMIT has also adjusted its position as a new university, and has conformed to some aspects of the university that are clearly traditional. This is particularly apparent in the use of titles such as 'vice chancellor' and 'professor'. It has also faced the consequence of increasing recruitment of academic staff from more traditional universities and the potential for these staff to influence a subtle but incremental cultural drift within RMIT towards a more traditional model.

Overall, David Pugh believes that as a result of the developments of the last decade,

... there's been far less differentiation and there's been much more movement from traditional universities towards application, while universities of technology...have moved to somehow feel that they have to justify themselves within the education system itself, so there's been a drawing together...and more homogeneity in the kinds of programmes that are offered and the universities that now formulate them. (Pugh, 63)

The impact of the Dawkins reforms of the late 1980s on diversity in higher education in Australia has, according to David Beanland, been somewhat paradoxical. One of the justifications for the establishment of the Unified National System was that it would lead to great diversity within the higher education sector, and that the many new universities established in the early 1990s would have, in theory, an opportunity to establish themselves as distinctive contributors to that sector. However, Beanland contends that 'too many universities were new, had no image or name, and had to look like traditional universities to get respectability...and have gone down the path of a traditional set of values because of the established nature of those' (Beanland, 194). He further suggests that the forced amalgamations of CAEs with universities inevitably resulted in the subjugation of the former's mission and values to the latter's traditional approach, and that this choked the potential for the development of a 'new university' culture. For example,

... if you take Monash, it took Caulfield [CAE] which had a very applied engineering school and a very relevant business school. Both of these have been crushed by the traditional ones [of Monash] that they were in competition with. They were made to feel second-rate. (Beanland, 196)

Overall, 'a lot of the Dawkins' decisions did not lead to the diversity that he wanted to claim because they were too unsure about this issue of status' (Beanland, 196).

While the Dawkins' reforms themselves may not have promoted the diversity that was hoped for, Professor Beanland still contends that, today, the higher education system is 'more diverse than people realise' (Beanland, 171). Certainly, with respect to RMIT, his objective as Vice Chancellor was 'to put RMIT as far away from the traditional universities as is possible' (Beanland, 171). He therefore places the University of

Sydney at one end of a continuum and RMIT at the other, while acknowledging that 'even within Sydney there's some diverse and creative elements' (Beanland, 171). This diversity he sees especially within courses and programmes and teaching methods that provide quite different solutions for well-established professions such as engineering or architecture. By contrast, 'on the research side the diversity is nowhere as strong. It's biased by history far too much towards theory' (Beanland, 171).

The critical element for sustained diversity within Australian higher education is, according to both David Beanland and David Pugh, the need for the universities to operate with reasonable degrees of autonomy and therefore have the potential to respond to the needs of their communities and stakeholders, and that this leads to diversity. Diversity thus created is good for those communities and therefore good for the universities that serve them and for the system as a whole. The next challenge, according to David Pugh, is 'how you match this [community focus] with the notion of a global economy' (Pugh, 197). And nowhere is this global influence more evident than in the profound impact of e-learning and the availability of information on the Internet. David Beanland contends that 'the electronic age will actually enhance diversity. You could argue that it won't, that it will actually cause a standard of material that everybody adopts. ...I don't think that will happen' (Beanland, 177). He believes that this 'revolution we're going to have makes it all the more important that universities know where they're going, what they're trying to do, or they won't survive. It's a real test' (Beanland, 178).

Looking at the system as a whole, David Beanland is a strong advocate for the 'new' university. He argues that there has been a significant shift away from information-based education. According to Beanland, 'it's the experience of the course that's important and not just the information content. The information is now cheap and readily available. It's how you use it, the attitudes and familiarity with a broad range of issues that [a student] can build on' (Beanland, 188). He therefore believes strongly that

... universities need to move away from the 'exploring knowledge' field. Whether there could be too many universities going in that direction and we could lose all the knowledge-based institutions, I think that will sort itself out. My concern at the moment would be that we need many more of what I call 'new universities' that have a development ethos that is about commitment to the development of people who can operate in the new world. ...The real purpose of a university is employment and the economic and social development of the country. (Beanland, 188)

In his advocacy for this new form of university, Professor Beanland could be seen to be promoting a new form of homogeneity around his model of the 'new university'. However, he believes that this model 'requires a whole range of diverse fields because there are so many different things you can want and be. While universities are open to that, they themselves will be diverse and they will be successful. ...They will be generated in the developing world because that's the only university that they'll want' (Beanland, 189).

Summary

Significantly, RMIT did not deliberately set out to be distinctive when it was redesignated as a university in 1992. According to the interviewees it was already distinctive because of its long history as a technical college and institute of technology, with its inner-city location. The most important action for the new university was, in fact, to reaffirm its roots and ensure that it was not thought to be the same as the other older universities in Melbourne at that time. It was partially for this reason that it did not formally change its name, remaining Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and using the 'university' name only in its logo: 'RMIT University'.

RMIT's distinctiveness was based on its applied vocational mission and its strong links with industry, although it was admitted that the latter were not quite as strong as the rhetoric of the time might have indicated. It was, at that time, primarily a teaching institution, with a strong commitment to student learning and qualifications which led to employment for its graduates. Research was limited, and was entirely applied in nature,

with an industry, problem-solving focus, in contrast to the extensive fundamental research orientation of the neighbouring University of Melbourne.

Eight years later, there remains a conviction that RMIT has stuck to its mission, and has reinforced its commitment to vocational employment-focused education, and to the maintenance of strong links with industry. There was an acknowledgement, however, that there had been some drift towards a more traditional university environment in terms of the student profile, which had significantly increased in its percentage of school leavers. There was also an acknowledgement that the staff profile had shifted towards one with more academic staff recruited from other universities and therefore without recent practical experience, although the practical experience of staff remains a distinctive feature of the university. Overall, RMIT was considered to be the first-choice university for an increasing number of students and enjoyed high status in the eyes of its key stakeholder groups.

With respect to the higher education system as a whole, those interviewed felt that there was more diversity than may at first be apparent. However, there was also a shared view that institutional convergence had occurred over the last ten years, mainly because of the shift in emphasis of the traditional universities towards a more applied and vocational mission. This is particularly apparent in research, with the result that little differentiation is now possible between universities on this characteristic. There is also considered to be a tendency for some of the newer universities without significant histories to seek to emulate the traditional universities as the only means of acquiring status and reputation. Particular mention was made of the advent of e-learning and its potential to enhance diversity amongst universities.

ILLUSTRATION 3: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Background

The origins of the University of South Australia can be traced back to the mid-1800s and the establishment of the South Australian School of Art (founded in 1856), the South Australian School of Mines (founded in 1889). These two educational institutions progressively evolved into the South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE) and the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT), respectively. In 1991, SACAE and SAIT merged to form the University of South Australia (UniSA). Today, UniSA is South Australia's largest university with over 25,000 students studying at six campuses throughout the state and internationally.

The Statements of Strategic Intent and Strategic Directions of UniSA are presented in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 respectively.

The Interviews

Theme 1 The extent to which diversity and differentiation were central to UniSA at the time of redesignation, and the manifestation of that differentiation at that time.

In order to gain an understanding of the importance of diversity and differentiation to the new University of South Australia, it is essential to understand the background to the merger of the South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE) and the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) which led to the formation of the new university. In the immediate post-Dawkins environment, there were a number of proposals to rationalise South Australia's higher education structure, some of which reached quite advanced stages of negotiation. One focused on a model that would have seen the existing two universities, the University of Adelaide and Flinders University, each acquire parts of both SACAE and SAIT to form two new larger universities for the state. SAIT and Flinders University were also in long-term discussions which 'broke

down at the last minute’ (Bradley, 30⁶), and SACAE was talking to the University of Adelaide. In addition ‘there were certainly people in the Institute of Technology who believed that they would be better going it alone’ (Bradley, 17) and a similar voice from SACAE advocating its redesignation as a stand-alone university.

Table 5.3 The Statement of Strategic Intent of the University of South Australia (from University of South Australia, 1999)

<p>STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC INTENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating professionals • Creating and applying knowledge • Serving the community
<p>Together we</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value quality, diversity, sustainability and equality. • create, apply and communicate knowledge which delivers economic and social benefits through action that is • intelligent in its use of new and emerging technologies • innovative, collaborative and enterprising • flexible, international and industry focussed • student-centred, service-oriented and multi-disciplinary • built upon our strengths. <p>Our graduates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • operate effectively with and upon a body of knowledge of sufficient depth to begin professional practice • are prepared for lifelong learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice • are effective problem-solvers, capable of applying logical, critical and creative thinking to a range of problems • can work both autonomously and collaboratively as professionals • are committed to ethical action and social responsibility as professionals and as citizens • communicate effectively in professional practice and as members of the community • demonstrate an international perspective as professionals and as citizens

In the end an alternative model, based on the merger of SAIT and SACAE to form a third university in South Australia, was proposed and promoted by Denise Bradley, who was then Deputy Director of SACAE. And, while this proposal was eventually adopted and the new university established, there were some clear perceptions that the union was a mismatch of cultures, foci, and status for the two constituent institutions. According to Denise Bradley,

⁶ The numerical reference following the interviewee’s name after each quotation refers to the QSR NUD*IST text unit from the relevant coded interview transcript.

... there was very much a view that the Institute of Technology was a superior institution - it could have redesignated in its own right - and that the South Australian College was a bit of a mish-mash with not very high quality, and not much status and prestige ... [based on] quite traditionally gendered views where the South Australian Institute of Technology saw itself as a 'boys' institution, and the College saw itself as a 'girls' institution. (Bradley, 18)

Table 5.4 The Statement of Strategic Directions of the University of South Australia (from University of South Australia, 1999)

<p>STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating professionals • Creating and applying knowledge • Serving the community <p>The University of South Australia works with industry and community partners to pursue common interests in developing a technologically advanced, sustainable and ethical society. Our teaching and research together focus on professional careers in a modern economy, contribute actively to the economic and social development of our society and use new and emerging technologies intelligently.</p> <p>Our founding Act requires the University to meet the educational needs of Australia's indigenous peoples. This commitment has been integrated into a comprehensive approach to achieving educational equity for all sectors of society. The diversity of our student population, including a large number of international students, enhances learning for all. We intend to meet the needs of our students to gain flexible access to learning, particularly through the innovative use of information technologies. We have a clear view of the qualities we wish to see our graduates demonstrate as professionals and members of their communities.</p> <p>Our success in a competitive and increasingly international environment is based on actively shaping our program profile, managing our research activities and pursuing mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances with other universities and organisations, locally and internationally. The University's programs are innovative and oriented to developing professionals, supported by consultation with community and professional associations. Our research is mainly applied, commonly involving industry partners, and aims to provide solutions to technological, economic and social problems.</p> <p>Doing things well is important to us. We constantly strive to improve the quality of all our activities and recognise this means active pursuit of purposeful change.</p> <p>The University will maintain its ability to adapt rapidly, seeking out new opportunities whenever they arise. Our development will be guided by our commitments to industry and community partnerships, equity, diversity and quality, and supported by decision-making processes which are open and participative, engaging student representatives and staff in well-informed discussion of the University's environment, aspirations and achievements.</p>
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This view is echoed by Ken Atkins, who played a key role in the integration of the two institutions once the decisions were made. As a former senior staff member of the Institute of Technology he acknowledges that SAIT ‘came from a different background, and there were people who said we were silly to join the College because we had an identity of our own and we should retain it’ (Atkins, 47). However, in spite of these difficulties, the merger went ahead and, in the eyes of many, proved to be ‘one of the most successful, compared with most of the mergers that took place around that period of time’ (Taylor, 18).

The fact that the new university was created by the amalgamation of two formerly independent institutions with such different cultures and programmes was critical to the notion of distinctiveness for the new institution. Both Denise Bradley and Ken Atkins are adamant that a deliberate attempt was made to differentiate UniSA from the two existing universities in South Australia. In planning for the new university, Professor Bradley, as Deputy-Vice Chancellor, led the development of the strategic plan for the new institution by initially ‘trying to clarify what was distinctive about the previous institutions, what were the common areas of distinctiveness rather than separate areas of distinctiveness’ (Bradley, 6).

Technology was clearly a critical point of distinctiveness for SAIT, ‘but the two merging partners were in fact not both technological’ (Atkins, 11). Nowhere did this become more apparent than in the decision for the name of the new institution. According to Liz Watson, ‘there was a lot of debate and dissent about that because the people who came from the Institute of Technology would like to have seen it being called the South Australian University of Technology’ (Watson, 22), but as Bradley comments, ‘it was clear to me that the College would never buy “technology” in the name, and that was going to be a really big problem’ (Bradley, 45).

In the end, agreement was reached to use the name ‘University of South Australia’ as an acceptable compromise, and to sacrifice any possible branding advantage that might have flowed from the use of the ‘university of technology’ generic name. Today, this

means that UniSA is the only member of the Australian Technology Network (ATN) not to have 'technology' in its formal name. The issue of the name 'still sits there...but if we were doing it now, it would be less of an issue and people would take a much more intelligent view to see if there is a strategic advantage in the use of the word' (Bradley, 64).

In spite of choosing a name that did not indicate that UniSA was different to the University of Adelaide or Flinders University, the new university was determined to be distinctive. 'No one thought for a moment that the establishment of the university would turn it into some sort of sandstone university' (Taylor, 11), or that 'there was ever any possibility that it could become like the University of Adelaide' (Watson, 6).

However, there was a downside to this distinctiveness. As the current Vice Chancellor puts it:

... we had a problem...which is that most people hold a very traditional notion of universities in their heads, so we had, and still have an issue of our status and prestige, which is largely related to the age of the institution, but secondly to the fact that there are some very traditional ideas of what is a university, and many of our staff feel like that. (Bradley, 53)

In the absence of a name that clearly indicated difference from the other, older universities, UniSA worked hard to identify its distinctiveness and build on those aspects of its performance which would demonstrate that the new university offered a genuine alternative to the other universities in the state. Central to this distinctiveness were the strong links to the professions and industry and the applied nature of the teaching and research. 'We were a university which saw application as being important in that the emphasis on our courses would be one of co-operation with industry, and application' (Atkins, 16). At the time of redesignation, the new university also 'didn't have general science courses and didn't have general arts courses' (Watson, 6), but had 'courses which were predominantly all professional vocational courses' (Atkins, 16). This departure from the traditional offerings of a university was reviewed and reinforced early in the new university's history when, as Denise Bradley, who was then

Deputy Vice Chancellor, puts it, 'we made a decision, with some blood on the table, that there be no general arts degree in this university, and that any arts or social science offerings would have a professional focus' (Bradley, 193).

The close links with industry and the professions were a key point of differentiation from the existing universities, particularly the more traditional University of Adelaide, and, from Denise Bradley's perspective, these links were valued by the professions.

I think that a significant number of professions with which we related saw that there was an opportunity for something different, saw the other two universities as less responsive, less tuned to reality, to the real world, and saw the formation of this university as a great opportunity to build on some of what they considered to be real advantages of the two CAEs which they'd been before. (Bradley, 79)

While an industry focus was clearly at the heart of the new university's distinctiveness, the overt commitment to its various communities, and particularly to indigenous peoples was also central to its purpose. In fact, the founding Act for UniSA requires the university to meet the educational needs of Australia's indigenous peoples [UniSA, 2001 #173].

Overall, UniSA's stakeholders had a clear picture of the new university and what it stood for. According to Liz Watson, 'we were seen as young, as very focused on industry, easier to get into in terms of cut-off scores and in terms of fairly broad entry requirements' (Watson, 56). There was also a clear distinction between UniSA and the other two South Australian universities. 'They saw Flinders as a research university and they saw Adelaide as the traditional, high-quality sandstone university, and they saw us as very much the brash newcomer on the block' (Watson, 56).

One manifestation of this perception was the new university's continued focus on teaching. 'There was an emphasis on teaching at that stage. That was a significant difference between the universities and the old college system, that there was an emphasis on teaching which was a rude word in universities in those days' (Atkins, 189). Balancing this was UniSA's inexperience in research. According to Denise

Bradley, commenting from a college perspective, 'we had no research performance really at all. The Institute of Technology didn't have much but they had a lot more than we had' (Bradley, 33). This was reflected in the fact that research 'wasn't funded like the University of Adelaide' (Watson, 12). However, a comprehensive research management plan was developed for the new university very early in its establishment, and UniSA has stuck closely to this plan over the last ten years. Central tenets to this plan were 'collaborative research with industry, collaboration more generally, cell activity and concentration' (Bradley, 102), which were common to all the ATN universities. In the early 1990s this focus on industry links and 'the way our courses and our research was linked to industry was different from the way that the other two universities worked' (Bradley, 67).

The lack of research activity amongst the staff of UniSA at the time of its establishment was a concern for Denise Bradley, as the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the new university. 'We certainly had a very large number of people who were not in any way connected into the scholarship of their area, let alone the research in their area' (Bradley, 199). And a reliance on the common belief that the academic staff of the CAEs were better at teaching than their university counterparts was perhaps not justified. 'There's no real evidence at all that we taught better than the universities. We used to say we did but I'm fairly dubious about it. We all probably taught as badly as each other' (Bradley, 200).

In spite of these limitations, there was a clear agreement from leaders of both SACAE and SAIT to create a new university which would 'concentrate on people who were practically and professionally useful when they came out. We would continue to work closely with industry and employers in terms of our courses and our course structures' (Bradley, 32).

Theme 2 The extent to which UniSA has retained its differentiation since redesignation, and the current manifestation of that differentiation.

Ten years after redesignation, there is a clear view about the extent to which distinctiveness, which UniSA nurtured when it was established, has been maintained. According to Ken Atkins, 'well and truly; it's been reinforced because there's no doubt that a number of areas in the combined institution have blossomed in research activities and in international standing as a result of it' (Atkins, 68). Denise Bradley goes further: 'I think it has intensified; ...there's quite a clear view that there's a difference between the University of South Australia and the other two universities' (Bradley, 84). UniSA has undertaken regular market research to check that perceptions of key stakeholders align with the university's own expectations. This research consistently indicates 'that the university is about an education for the real world, that it's more modern. The words that come up are 'modern', 'progressive', 'real world', and 'getting a job' (Bradley, 137).

The core of this difference continues to revolve around UniSA relationships with, and commitment to, industry, which presents the university as 'the place to go if you want to have an industry-oriented relevant education' (Bradley, 84). This is reflected by the attributes of graduates who are believed to be 'more work ready' (Atkins, 142). This is well illustrated by the changing circumstances of the engineering profession, which previously relied heavily on the post-graduation training of university graduates through the public service to complete the preparation of engineers for the profession. When the public service changed its policy and no longer employed new graduate engineers, the consulting practices had to employ them themselves, and found they 'could quite often get a more "down to earth" attitude from [graduates of] the University of South Australia than from the University of Adelaide' (Atkins, 137). According to Watson, the perception is that 'if you want to be a research engineer, go to the University of Adelaide; if you want to be a practising engineer, go to the University of South Australia' (Watson, 184).

An acknowledged drawback of this sort of reputation is the bogey of status for a new university. This is partly unavoidable because of ‘the prestige associated with history’ (Atkins, 115), but as the current Vice Chancellor puts it, ‘there’s still hanging over us the status question; you know, does “relevant” mean low status? The old British distinction between the hand and the mind and the British class system still permeates these distinctions’ (Bradley, 85). Notwithstanding this concern, Denise Bradley is confident that the path chosen is the right one.

I think it is part of a disastrous set of value positions in this country and all those countries that have been affected by the British education system about the amazing status that is given to truly useless knowledge and the lack of status given to useful knowledge. The work we’re doing with our various stakeholders would suggest that we are increasingly being seen as a huge advantage to South Australia in that we’re seen as relevant, responsive and international. (Bradley, 90)

One of the manifestations of the University of South Australia’s current distinctiveness is its student population, and the ways in which students are treated. According to Atkins, ‘students are really considered more important than some of the older universities consider them...[they] are able to get help more readily whereas in the universities a greater proportion of staff are less ready to give help to students’ (Atkins, 130/173). UniSA still relies heavily on the non-school-leaver segment for enrolments, and ‘about 55% of our undergraduate intake is not school-leavers’ (Bradley, 167). This is in contrast to the other universities, but is becoming less so. For instance, ‘Adelaide is essentially school-leavers, but we have made a big inroad into the school-leaver population over the last few years’ (Bradley, 172). The Vice Chancellor acknowledged that this change potentially reduced the distinctiveness of UniSA in this area, but also commented that Australian universities in general are finding it more and more difficult to recruit non-year 12 students because of changes to the repayment schedules for HECS. It is also harder to distinguish part-time from full-time students, because most ‘full-time’ students now work.

UniSA has also changed its profile with respect to international students. From being distinctive through a lack of international students in the early 1990s, UniSA is now

distinctive because of its international profile. The university now 'has far more [international students] than the other two universities, although we did start behind the eight ball, so we've really galloped ahead in those areas' (Watson, 99). Part of the reason for this is 'that we're far ahead of the other two universities in this state in terms of on-line learning, our involvement with outside bodies where we teach offshore, and our alliances with other universities internationally' (Watson, 77).

Theme 3 The impact of the political, funding and market environment of higher education on diversity in the system as a whole and on the differentiation of UniSA and its neighbouring institutions.

There is a clear sense from those interviewed that UniSA has been true to its mission of 1991, and has attempted to retain its distinctiveness as a university in South Australia. However, there are some signs that, over the last ten years, the other universities have made significant changes to their approach. For example, according to Denise Bradley, 'Flinders is now going after the equity student on a grand scale, which is our turf, and the University of Adelaide is developing a joint course with Regency College of TAFE, which was absolutely our turf ten years ago' (Bradley, 100). On a broader scale, 'all the universities now have been forced into co-operating with industry...but we were the people who worked with industry long before the universities themselves turned round and started to do that' (Atkins, 78). This view is supported by Professor Bradley, who believes that 'from the perspective of the student there's been an increasing emphasis even in the traditional universities on vocationalism driven by unemployment. ...The traditional universities are now much more applied, both in teaching and research' (Bradley, 192). Liz Watson also believes that there is less diversity amongst South Australian universities than there used to be, and considers that 'there's been far more movement in Adelaide and Flinders towards us, than there has been from us towards them, except maybe in the research area' (Watson, 61). Given this reality, UniSA apparently has less of a focus on marketing itself as different, and more of a focus on marketing itself as better. 'We used to [market ourselves as different] perhaps more overtly than we do now. I think we've been around for ten years now and I don't think we do market ourselves as different any more' (Watson, 67).

The driver for any convergence that has occurred over the last ten years is clearly the competitive survival instinct that has come about as Australian higher education has moved from a time when ‘in the eighties, we had students running out of our ears. ...But that’s all changed, now we are competing for numbers and the traditional universities have had to tailor their courses for the market place a lot more than they ever used to’ (Taylor, 105).

According to the interviewees, in terms of institutional diversity, the experiences of South Australia are to some extent a reflection of the system as a whole. There is a sense that, in the broadest of terms, universities are more alike than they used to be. Denise Bradley believes that there is

... probably less diversity in the sense of fewer degrees being taught by people who aren’t scholars...and institutions where the whole concept of university is more contested than it was, both on class, gender and relevance. I’m not at all unhappy with the cutting off of the ludicrous triumphalist male dominated, class dominated, old university and the soft, sloppy, lacking in any kind of intellectual rigour, bottom end of the CAEs, and instead seeing institutions which are contesting what it is to be a university in the twenty first century. (Bradley, 199/201)

Notwithstanding this view, Bradley also acknowledges that ‘there’s a huge amount of difference between Charles Sturt University and the University of Melbourne’ (Bradley, 187).

Ken Atkins similarly considers that, overall, the diversity in the Australian higher education system has decreased over the last ten or so years as the new universities have increased their research and taken on more of the traditional trappings of the older universities, and these longer established universities have shifted ground to embrace a more applied mission and direct links with industry. However, Atkins certainly sees a clear distinction between the ATN universities and the sandstones, based largely on ‘their background, their history, that’s probably the most distinctive characteristic. ...[The ATN universities] are all recognised for teaching vocational courses,

professional courses which you came out from generally useful in the area you had been trained in' (Atkins, 110). Mary Taylor agrees: '[UniSA] is certainly different from the sandstones, we know that, but there are similarities within the ATN' (Taylor, 112).

Summary

The University of South Australia had to establish itself as a new institution, as well as a university, given that it was the result of a seemingly unlikely merger between a technology-focused institute of technology (SAIT), and social science-focused college of advanced education (SACAE). The tension between the two merger partners was particularly evident in the decision not to use 'technology' in the name of the new university, even though technology was a key point of differentiation for SAIT. At the time of its redesignation it therefore made a deliberate attempt to differentiate itself from the two other universities in South Australia, recognising that a potential lack of prestige and status represented particular problems for this new university.

UniSA's distinctiveness was built on its applied mission and on the technology strengths of SAIT. It established a deliberate policy not to offer general arts and science programmes and to focus on vocational programmes preparing people for employment. It valued its strong links with industry and the professions. UniSA's research activity at the time of redesignation was minimal, and that which did occur was largely applied research from former SAIT staff. The combined staff of the new university had strong practical experience, but lacked the underpinning depth of scholarship of academic staff at other universities. A particularly distinctive characteristic for UniSA was its commitment to the indigenous people of South Australia, to the extent that that commitment was enshrined in its enabling legislation.

Ten years later, those interviewed believe that UniSA's differentiation has intensified. It is seen as a modern progressive university which produces work-ready graduates and enjoys the strong support of industry and the professions. The student body continues to have a much higher proportion of non-school leavers than the University of Adelaide and Flinders University, but it was acknowledged that UniSA had significantly

increased its proportion of the school leaver market, thus converging with the other universities for this characteristic. Convergence had also occurred where Flinders University had moved into the equity environment, and Adelaide had established direct links with the TAFE sector, both areas that were historically the domain of UniSA.

Concern was expressed that UniSA, with its focus on relevant vocational education, was still fighting for status in an environment in which prestige and tradition are still seen to be more valued than relevance and usefulness. There was a shared feeling that convergence had occurred over the last ten years in Australian higher education, and that most of the movement had come from the more traditional universities as they embraced a more applied mission. However, there was still a significant difference between the traditional 'sandstone' university and a typical university of technology from the ATN.

DISCUSSION

The illustrative interviews with senior staff from Queensland University of Technology, RMIT University and the University of South Australia reveal significant consistency in the way in which interviewees see their respective institutions and account for the differentiation that exists between their universities and neighbouring more traditional universities. While this consistency predominates, there are nevertheless some important points of difference between the three universities, and much of this difference can be attributed to the different circumstances of each institution's redesignation as a university. In particular, the variation associated with merger circumstances on the one hand, and the name of the new university on the other, has impacted on the post-redesignation development of each university. This variation is summarised in Table 5.5, below.

Table 5.5 Variation in merger circumstances and establishing the name of the new university for QUT, RMIT and UniSA.

PRE-EXISTING INSTITUTIONS	MERGER CIRCUMSTANCES	NEW UNIVERSITY NAME
Queensland Institute of Technology	Post-redesignation merger with Brisbane College of Advanced Education	Straightforward change: Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	Simultaneous merger with Phillip Institute of Technology	No formal change: Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University)
South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT), South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE)	Pre-redesignation merger between SAIT and SACAE, with one campus going to Flinders University	Problematic name change with decision not to include 'of technology' in name: University of South Australia (UniSA)

For QUT, the post-redesignation merger with Brisbane College of Advanced Education was seen as a distinct benefit in that it made QUT into a genuinely comprehensive university. However, the prevailing reputation and history carried by the new university was that of Queensland Institute of Technology, and this was reflected in the minimal name change (QIT to QUT) and the ongoing commitment to the general vocational mission of QIT.

For RMIT, the situation was somewhat similar. The merger with Phillip Institute of Technology had little impact on RMIT's redesignation as a university, and the prevailing reputation for the new university was that of the old RMIT with its long history of applied and vocational education. So strong was the reputation of RMIT that no serious attempt was made to change its formal name after redesignation, and in fact the visible manifestation of the change to university status was initially suppressed to give reassurance to RMIT's key stakeholders that the mission of the institution had not changed.

For the University of South Australia, the situation was quite different. The new university was created by the merger of the South Australian Institute of Technology and the South Australian College of Advanced Education and, in the interests of

ensuring that the merger was smooth and the new university was well founded, neither of the contributing institutions took precedence when it came to presenting the new university's credentials. This neutrality was emphasised by the choice of name for the new university, and the deliberate decision not to use 'university of technology' in its title, in contrast to other members of the ATN.

Both QUT and RMIT, as new universities, therefore carried with them a distinctiveness built on reputation which they were at pains to maintain to the extent of making minimal changes to their respective names on redesignation. For UniSA, however, the merger required a new identity to be established with a new name, and while the applied mission of this university is very similar to that of QUT and RMIT, it would appear that UniSA has had greater difficulty establishing its distinctiveness in the marketplace. Both QUT and RMIT make the point that while they considered differentiation from the other existing universities was essential, they did not deliberately set out to be distinctive universities. The distinctiveness existed because of the kind of institutions that they already were and wished to remain. For UniSA, on the other hand, there was a deliberate proactive policy aimed at promoting the new university's distinctiveness, and only in recent years has distinctiveness ceased to be a primary marketing objective.

So while distinctiveness was achieved by different means, there was and remains a great deal of common ground between the three universities which strengthens the shared belief that they, and other members of the ATN, constitute a distinctive group of universities in Australia. In particular, in the eyes of the interviewees, each of the three universities has:

- an applied mission;
- vocational programmes which produce employable work-ready graduates;
- a growing commitment to career-focused postgraduate coursework programmes;
- strong links with industry, business and the professions;
- an eclectic student body with a high proportion of 'non-traditional' students;
- a high part-time enrolment pattern;

- a growing percentage of international students; and
- a commitment to applied research that supports and is largely funded by industry.

It is interesting to reflect on the compatibility between these stated characteristics of each of the three universities, and their respective positioning statements. For QUT, there would not appear to be good congruence. QUT's mission and goals statements (refer Figure 5.2) are very non-specific, with the mission 'to bring to the community the benefits of teaching, research, technology and service' (Queensland University of Technology 1998), in particular, saying little if anything about the distinctiveness of the university, to the point that the statement could belong to any Australian university. Interestingly the one potentially distinctive word in the statement: '*technology*', is not a characteristic of QUT to which the senior staff interviewed made any significant reference. QUT's goals are a little more specific to the espoused applied purpose of the university, but still do not differentiate it clearly from other more traditional universities. From a senior management perspective, then, the university is clearly seen to be distinctive on a number of critical fronts, but from a macro-system perspective, looking at the positioning statements of the university, this level of distinctiveness is not so apparent. The irony in this is that QUT's positioning statements have presumably been guided by the same senior staff whose interview responses offer a somewhat different picture of their university and its priorities.

For RMIT, the situation is quite different. The positioning statements for this university (refer Figure 5.3) make clear and overt reference to the applied and vocational priorities advocated by those interviewed, and there is a high degree of congruity between the formal positioning statements of the university and the expressed beliefs of those interviewed about its priorities and direction. A similar consistency exists for the University of South Australia. UniSA has two complementary positioning statements: a Statement of Strategic Direction (refer Figure 5.5) and a Statement of Strategic Intent (refer Figure 5.4). Both make overt reference to applied career-focused education and

research and show a high degree of consistency with the stated views of those interviewed about the direction and priorities of their institution.

With the exception of QUT's somewhat anomalous positioning statements, there is a high degree of consistency between the formal and informal statements about each university, and between the universities, all of which emphasise the differentiation of each of these universities from their immediate competitors. But notwithstanding this picture of distinctiveness, there was also a very clear response from all of those interviewed that the particular position of the 'university of technology', exemplified by the above characteristics, is becoming harder to maintain. This is because of a clear perception of convergence amongst Australian universities. Perhaps not surprisingly, those interviewed were unanimous in their view that the bulk of the convergent movement had come from the traditional universities. The senior managers, and especially the vice chancellors, were each adamant that their respective universities had remained true to their applied, industry-focused, vocational missions, and that any loss of distinctiveness had come from the movement of the more traditional universities as they encroached more and more on 'their patch'.

Specific illustrations of the convergent behaviour displayed by the more traditional universities suggested by those interviewed include:

- the move to adopt a more applied mission;
- the development of active partnerships with industry and business;
- the development of more vocational programmes with a stated employment outcome;
- the proactive support for more applied research, especially where that is funded by industry; and
- more enabling enrolment policies to encourage non-traditional student groups such as TAFE students and indigenous peoples.

On the other hand, some acknowledgement was given to the reality that the universities of technology had moved somewhat in the direction of their more traditional competitors in a number of areas, such as:

- the appointment of more staff from other universities rather than from industry;
- the adjustment of organisational culture towards a more traditional model, reflecting the impact of greater numbers of staff from this environment;
- the enrolment of an increasing number of school leavers, previously the dominant domain of the traditional university;
- the broadening of the research focus and the increasing prioritisation of research; and
- the adoption of many of the trappings and symbolism of the traditional university.

The reasons for this convergence were also made clear. First, it was felt that the Australian national system of higher education with its standard performance indicators, uniformly applied policies and, in particular, its 'one size fits all' approach to funding was inevitably breeding conformity as each university attempted to plan its future in the face of the same overriding environmental influences. This applies equally to the convergent tendencies of the traditional universities as it does the new universities.

Secondly, for many of the newer universities, status emulation was believed to be a significant factor contributing to convergence. For many newer universities with no history or established reputation of their own, the adoption of the traditional values and activities of the more established universities is considered a justifiable means of improving their image and status. This trend is exacerbated by the tendency for official and unofficial university ranking systems that demand those institutions at the bottom of a list to seek to raise their standards by emulating the more successful above them. Significantly, interviewees from QUT and RMIT did not express overt concern for the status of their respective universities. This was due in part to the long history that each had stretching back to well before redesignation, and to the fact that they had each

remained consistent in their core purpose and direction (in spite of QUT's somewhat bland positioning statements). By contrast, UniSA interviewees, especially the Vice Chancellor, did express concern that their university was still battling to establish itself in terms of status. This is clearly a result of the circumstances of their establishment and the lack of a clear, unified history and reputation on which to build.