THE AMBITION TO BE DIFFERENT

THE INTERSECTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY AND NATIONAL POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Date:

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships between institutional ambition to be different and national policy in the higher education environment. It explores the notion of institutional diversity from a variety of perspectives within an underpinning context of the changing nature of the university, and the form of a contemporary university of technology.

The study is built around a broad case study of institutional diversity in Australia and New Zealand. The post-war history of change from a unitary to a binary and back to a unitary system of higher education in Australia is reviewed and investigated with particular reference to the emergence of the 'university of technology' as a distinctive form of university in Australia. The ambition to be different of three institutional members of the Australian Technology Network (ATN), namely Queensland University of Technology, RMIT University, and the University of South Australia, is illustrated through a series of interviews with key senior staff of these institutions. The actual institutional differentiation of these universities from more traditional universities in Australia is considered from different stakeholder perspectives.

The ebb and flow of diversity in New Zealand higher education is then explored, reflecting on illustrations and examples from Australia. In the New Zealand setting particular emphasis is placed on the intended and unintended consequences of 1990 education legislation, and on the institutional ambition of one institution, UNITEC Institute of Technology, to become a distinctive university of technology within a national higher education system of largely traditional universities.

The study indicates that a number of intersecting factors, such as the environment, national policy, funding, competition and ranking impact significantly on institutional diversity within a national higher education system, and that, in the absence of strong and unambiguous policy specifically promoting diversity, these factors will promote institutional convergence rather than diversity. Within this environment, it is therefore extremely difficult for a single institution to promote and maintain its own distinctiveness.