



Association for Tertiary Education Management Inc

**Submission to Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small
Business and Education References Committee**

**The Capacity of Public Universities to Meet Australia's Higher
Education Needs**

Introduction

The Association for Tertiary Education Management (ATEM) is *the* professional association in Australasia for administrators and managers in universities, other tertiary education institutions, government and related organisations. The Association was established in 1976 as the Australian Institute of Tertiary Education Administrators (AITEA) and changed its name in 1997 to reflect the changing environment in which it existed and in which its members worked. ATEM is incorporated in Australia and New Zealand and publishes the international refereed *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. The Association's patron is Professor Fay Gale.

ATEM's major strategic objectives for 2001-2003 are to:

- represent the professional interests and concerns of tertiary education administrators and managers throughout Australasia;
- maintain and improve the level of professional competence and practice in the field of tertiary education administration and management, and aid and advise on the professional development of its members;
- recognise outstanding contributions to tertiary education management and administrative practices; and
- endeavour to grow the organisation into new regions, particularly Asia and the Pacific.

The Association has, in 2001, incorporated the *Association for Tertiary Education Management Foundation Pty Ltd* which has as its objects to:

- generally improve the standard of tertiary education in Australia through improvement in tertiary education management and administration;
- facilitate members and non-members sharing information and ideas in the area of tertiary education management and administration;
- formulate principles of best practice, promote and undertake research, gather data, and disseminate information of best practice, research results and data gathered to agencies and professionals in the areas of tertiary education management and administration;
- provide professional education and training to persons in the area of tertiary education management in order to improve the efficiency and quality of tertiary institutions and tertiary education in Australia;
- provide facilities for professional education and training, including scholarships, research grants and travel grants, to persons in the area of tertiary education management and administration;
- maintain and improve the level of professional competence and practice in the field of tertiary education management and administration;
- promote management links, secondments and exchange programs between tertiary institutions, business, industry and government in Australia and internationally to benefit the education sector in Australia; and to stimulate tertiary education management and administration to facilitate innovation in the Australian tertiary education sector.

Partnerships with select organisations is being pursued to fund the activities of the Foundation which is expected to commence operations in 2002.

Further information about ATEM, including its strategic plan, can be found on the Association's comprehensive web-site: <http://www.atem.org.au>.

Submission

The Terms of Reference of the Committee's Inquiry focus on issues affecting the ability to universities to develop and transform to meet the changing economic, social and knowledge needs of Australian society. The Association is in a position to comment in more depth on two of the terms of reference, namely:

- (e) the factors affecting the ability of Australian public universities to attract and retain staff in the context of competitive local and global markets and the intellectual culture of universities; and
- (h) the nature and sufficiency of independent advice to government of higher education matters, particularly having regard to the abolition of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training.

Introduction

The emergence of an education industry, competitive markets, new private providers, increasing access to higher education, globalisation and the impact of the communications/information revolution demand of university staff, both academics and administrators, skills, experience training and qualifications of the highest order. Australian universities are part of a global system of higher education and its staff must be able to grow and adapt as the needs and demands of that system change now and in the future.

For universities to be managed effectively in the future competitive environment, it will be necessary for the talents and skills of **all** staff to be utilised fully, and for work to be carried out in ways that allow the university to adapt and grow as a core institution in the knowledge society. The current division of work in universities into the broad categories of teaching, research and management may therefore no longer be appropriate. The emergence of new and specialised areas of work, particularly in on-line curriculum development and multimedia, challenge existing work paradigms and are an indication of the urgent need for universities to re-assess how work is carried out and by whom. If the way in which work is organised does not allow universities to respond to the challenges of the future, the capacity of public universities to meet Australia's higher education needs will be undermined.

Staff

Any re-assessment of how work is organised will need to take into account the skills, talents and capabilities of all staff, both academic and general. General staff now make up more than half of all staff in Australian universities (DETYA, 1999). While general staff as a group are diverse, the work undertaken by a sub-set of general staff - administrators and managers - has professionalised and specialised in the last quarter of the 20th century. In 2001, it is increasingly recognised that administrators and managers play a vital role in the operation of universities. They have specific expertise in the management and administration of universities, but often carry out their role in isolation from the academic business of teaching and research. It is sometimes argued that academics and administrators have two separate cultures and two separate and opposing value systems. The implications of having two professional, expert groups in universities operating in parallel have not been fully explored, but the anecdotal divide between academics and administrators reflects a way of working that is no longer appropriate (Conway, 1998; McInnis, 1998).

There have been several major reviews of Australian universities (eg Dawkins, 1989; Hoare, 1995; West, 1998) where the role of general staff in universities is given only cursory mention. Yet if universities are to operate effectively in the transforming knowledge society of the 21st century, the values, attitudes and philosophies of this group of staff must be understood and taken into account in day-to-day and longer term planning and decision making. Their knowledge base, their training and their attitudes to work are critical to the effective operation of universities. The way in which administrators go about their work has the potential to affect the way academic work is conducted, so it is critical that universities attract and retain administrative staff who understand the unique academic nature of universities, how work is undertaken in academic organisations, and how they will contribute individually and collectively to the on-going development of universities as knowledge organisations.

Recent surveys of academic staff (eg McInnis, 2000) have indicated that there are increasing levels of stress in the higher education sector, resulting from a number of factors including rapidly increasing workloads and rapid change. The same stresses and strains affect administrators and their work (see Whyley and Callender, 1998, NTEU, 2000). In this environment, attracting and retaining general staff requires strategies focused on the benefits of developing a career in professional university administration and management. Working as a university administrator is not the same as working as an administrator in a business organisation. University administrators need to be provided with the opportunity to understand the nature of the work they do and how it contributes to the achievement of broader academic and educational goals. The benefits of a long term career in university administration and management need to be defined and promoted across the ranks of all general staff so that their role and the interdependence of their work with that of academics can be more clearly understood. In this context, ensuring appropriate career paths are identified and developed, and ensuring appropriate levels of support for professional development for general staff, assumes new importance.

The professional development of general staff has been at the heart of ATEM's activities since its establishment in 1976. In that time, it has developed comprehensive branch-based programs and activities to support the development of members and the increasing professionalisation and specialisation of administrative work in universities. ATEM's primary role is to ensure that its members in particular, and administrators and managers in general, are equipped with the skills, knowledge and networks that will enable them to effectively contribute to both their employing institutions and their emerging profession.

In the late 1990s, the Association held initial discussions with the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, the Australian National Training Authority and TAFE Directors Australia about the potential for intersectoral cooperation to develop a shared approach to professional development. ATEM seeks to extend the professional development effort of such groups into a coordinated, comprehensive, cross-sectoral program that will maintain and enhance the capacity of all staff with substantial management responsibilities, irrespective of their academic, administrative or professional background. Such a program would identify and address core/benchmark management skills, general and specific training needs, entry and promotional qualifications, a recognition process for selected academic and training activities and the establishment of joint and/or complementary cross-sectoral programs. ATEM will follow-up on discussions held with these groups during 2001 and would be pleased to provide additional information to the Inquiry upon request.

Independent Advice to Government

ATEM is an association focused around the professional needs and interests of its members. Its networks across Australasia and its agreements with like organisations in the United Kingdom (Association of University Administrators) and in the United States (American Association of University Administrators) give it a global perspective on the work of its members and the contributions they make to the organisations in which they play increasingly significant roles.

It would be timely for government to include ATEM as an organisation from which it can receive independent advice about matters relating to administrators and their work. ATEM never has, and will continue to make no claim to speak for universities. It is a professional association, however, which represents that group of staff whose role is assuming increasing importance for universities. The contribution that administrators and managers can make to the success of universities needs to be considered by government, particularly in terms of how new policy developments might be effectively and successfully implemented. ATEM can provide an additional, informed input into government's broader consultation processes to ensure a complete picture of the Australian higher education system is obtained.

References

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