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BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS AND THE DEMISE OF THE COMMONWEALTH TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

Neil Marshall

Discussion Paper No.8, March 1988

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1980s the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission functioned as a relatively independent, self-directed policy arena within the Commonwealth bureaucracy. Policy outputs tended to be consistent and coherent over time. During the last three or four years, however, a number of federal departments succeeded in gaining control over aspects of tertiary education policy. This development was due partly to a changed economic environment which encouraged the growth of cross-sectoral programs, and partly to administrative reforms introduced by the Hawke government which fostered increased inter-departmental competition. The outcome was the fragmentation of the tertiary education policy process. The removal of CTEC and the creation of the Department of Employment, Education and Training is an attempt to reimpose a greater degree of coordination and integration upon tertiary education policy procedures.

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Introduction

The announcement by the Hawke government in October 1987 that the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) would be abolished and most of its powers transferred to the newly created Department of Employment, Education and Training constituted a major change in the style of tertiary education policy-making at the federal level. For almost 30 years Canberra's relationship with the nation's tertiary institutions has been conducted through independent statutory commissions of one form or another. The government's removal of traditional procedures was widely attributed to a perception that CTEC was not being responsive enough to the requirements of industry and the government's own directives. The demise of CTEC, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, commented, was "a deliberate decision to increase ministerial responsibility and accountability in higher education.[1] Universities and colleges, it seems, have come to be regarded as economic policy instruments of substantial importance. That this is the case can be viewed as the outcome, to a considerable extent, of the activities of a number of government departments. Over a period of three or four years the commonwealth bureaucracy played a salient role in both placing tertiary education on the political agenda and creating an administrative environment which effectively undermined CTEC's continued viability.

Bureaucracy, Peters writes, has become "an increasingly significant - if not the most significant - feature of modern policy-making".[2] Yet, while the contribution made by government departments to the policy processes of Westminister systems has long been acknowledged by political scientists and public administration theorists, all too often these entities have been portrayed simply as "a homogenous mass operating in some Pavlovian fashion and shaped by a common ideology".[3] Fortunately, this misconception has been corrected in recent years by scholars such a Gray and Jenkins,[4] Page,[5] Pitt and Smith,[6] and Richardson and Jordan.[7] Public sector agencies, they indicate, carry out disparate tasks, possess different characteristics and values, and compete with each other for resources and control over programs. This picture of differentiation and competition, furthermore, is likely to become more accentuated where the functions of government are growing and increasing in complexity, but at the same time where agencies are subjected to expenditure restraints. Government departments are political organizations and their behaviour is an important factor in shaping the structure and development of government itself.

This article deals with one such instance; the decision to abolish CTEC was the consequence, at least in part, of the varied actions of several departments over time. It is argued that in the early 1980s CTEC functioned as

relatively autonomous, self-directed agency within the commonwealth bureaucratic structure. Policy issues were determined and executed very largely at CTEC's discretion. Policy outputs were generally coherent and and consistent from year to year. A number of federal agencies, however, developed both the motivation and the means to exert influence over the direction of tertiary education policy. As a result policy directives to the tertiary education sector became increasingly fragmented and contradictory in substance. The creation of the Department of Employment, Education and Training was both a necessary step to improve co-ordination and a recognition that the locus of tertiary education policy-making had shifted away from CTEC.

CTEC

CTEC was established in 1977 as a statutory authority to provide policy advice to the government on the development and funding requirements of tertiary education in Australia. The Commission was also made responsible for the administration of commonwealth financial grants to institutions. Assisting CTEC in its task were three subordinate advisory councils (the Universities Council, the Advanced Education Council and the Technical and Further Education Council) which made recommendations to the Commission on the needs of their respective sectors. The actual process of formulating policy for government deliberation - and its subsequent

implementation - was conducted in terms of a triennial cycle. Individual institutions and state authorities presented submission to the relevant advisory council for consideration. The reports of the three councils were then worked into a comprehensive policy statement by CTEC known as Volume 1. Volume 1 was circulated to interested commonwealth departments for comment before the minister placed a final proposal before cabinet. The decisions made by cabinet were known as the "guidelines" and consituted CTEC's formal policy directives. The guidelines became the basis for the Commission's specific measures over the next three years and were set out in Volume 2. Volume 2 provided the foundation for the states grants legislation.

For the first eight years or so of its existence, CTEC was the dominant voice in the direction of national tertiary education policy and its views prevailed on most issues. There were three major reasons for this. First, though education is the constitutional responsibility of the states, universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs) were almost entirely dependent upon the commonwealth - through CTEC - for funds (an influence that was less marked with regard to TAFE which drew only some 20% of its support from federal coffers). Second, the Commission had built up an impressive level of expertise in relation to tertiary institutional planning. When it was formed in 1977 it absorbed the resources and experience of three previously separate statutory

commissions, the oldest of which (the Australian Universities Commission) dated back to 1959. This evolutionary development allowed CTEC to benefit from, and build upon; continuity of activity, an accumulated store of specialized knowledge, and an established communications network.

Third, CTEC functioned as a relatively well-defined, self-contained and separate policy arena within the federal bureaucracy. Almost all commonwealth monies for tertiary education were allocated by the Commission and the vast majority of new initiatives emanated from, and were carried by, CTEC and its advisory councils. Though there were occasional skirmishes, the influence of other departments was largely peripheral. As one CTEC commissioner observed, "nobody cared much what we did";[8] a view that was supported by the Kirby Inquiry into labour market programs which was somewhat surprised by the "virtual isolation" of the tertiary education policy process (amongst others).[9]

This last factor, particularly, fostered a policy-making environment that was reasonably stable and certain over time. Initiatives planned for each triennium, though usually incremental in nature,[10] tended to be well-coordinated in content and predictable in outcome.

CTEC's internal coherence and continuity of purpose, however, became increasingly disrupted by intrusions

from external commonwealth agencies seeking to influence the direction of policy. This situation arose as a result of the blurring of sectoral boundaries between tertiary education and other policy arenas, the competitive nature of administrative reforms introduced by the Hawke government, and the ability of several departments to gain control of strategic resources which could be used to bargain for appropriate outcomes. Though discussed separately, these factors should be viewed as closely interrelated and circular in their overall effect.

The blurring of sectoral boundaries

The changing economic and social environment in Australia has given rise to an increasing interlinkage and interdependence of previously separate, or only marginally related, policy arenas. Over the last few years the nation has witnessed accelerating technological advancement and complexity in the manufacturing and process industries. Yet the supply of skilled labour has been insufficient to meet demand. Rapid and sudden structural change has created large pockets of mature unemployment. Despite the low value of the Australian dollar, companies have struggled to compete successfully on world markets. Managerial expertise has been criticised as lacking in sophistication while private sector investment in research and development has fallen well below the OECD norm for western countries. Despite improved school retention rates there is still a large pool of unemployed

youth. Public sector spending, though pruned regularly by the Hawke government, continues to be viewed as excessive and a significant contributor to the present economic malaise.

During the period 1984-86 there developed a growing conviction on the part of the commonwealth departments responsible for economic matters that the resources of the tertiary education sector must be utilised to ensure any long term solution to these problems. The Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce (DITAC) strongly advocated a greater industry orientation in the content and types of courses offered by institutions and, and in conjunction with the Department of Science (hereafter Science), viewed the harnessing of higher education research facilities and expertise to the commercial wagon as essential to any resurgence by the private sector in such activity. For the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR) the nature of vocational training was seen as an increasingly important ingredient in the success of its labour market programs. The Department of Finance (Finance) considered the tertiary education sector to be an area with potential for greater efficiency in operation and cost saving. The Department of Treasury (Treasury) appeared to share much the same perspective from a macro-economic standpoint. These agencies all came to view the role of different aspects of tertiary education as important to the furtherance of their own activities and interests. In Downs's terminology,

tertiary education moved into the purview of their "policy space".[11]

The erosion of previously established boundaries between tertiary education and the industry departments had also been encouraged by the recommendations of a number of cross-sectoral advisory bodies and inquiries. Both the Australian Science and Technology Council[12] and the Economic Planning Advisory Council[13] produced a number of reports which stressed the nexus between the teaching and research activities of tertiary institutions and economic performance. The report of the Kirby Inquiry into labour market program in 1985 emphasised the interdependence of education and employment policies.[14] In the external arena the OECD produced two reports which underlined the linkage between educational outputs and technological progress.[15] The significance of these cross-sectoral bodies was that by drawing attention to the fundamental relationship between segmented policy arenas they served to legitimise the involvement by other departments in issues previously considered the preserve of the tertiary education sector.

One outcome of this situation was that departments built up their levels of expertise in relation to the activities of universities and colleges. This expertise was used to develop and articulate departmental views on the role and function of institutions. Finance's submission to CTEC's Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness, for example,

proposed "rather substantial changes in the way institutions operate and are funded".[16] The Department went so far as to make recommendations on such matters as the types of courses to be offered, staffing policy and research practices. DEIR adopted a similar approach in its submission to CTEC's Review of TAFE Funding.[17] These were significant developments and indicated that CTEC's monopoly on policy advice in the tertiary sphere was being undermined; alternative perspectives became available with which to challenge the Commission's views on many issues.

Administrative reform and heightened competition

The blurring of inter-sectoral boundaries and the growth of duplicatory expertise was encouraged by the nature of administrative changes introduced into the bureaucratic environment after 1983.

During its first two years in office the Hawke government mounted what was, in the words of a senior Finance officer, "probably the most comprehensive package of budgeting and financial reforms in the history of the Commonwealth".[18] These reforms had been adumbrated in the ALP's 1983 platform document Labor and the Quality of Government and subsequently fleshed out in two policy statements, Reforming the Australian Public Service[19] and Budgetary Reform.[20] The two statements included a range of measures, but of particular relevance here are

the detailed proposals for a revamped and competitively-based Senior Executive Service, the integration of financial and staffing decisions, a greater degree of administrative independence for departments, the development of the Financial Management Improvement Program, and Program Budgeting. These new procedures began to be implemented gradually during 1984/85 within a corporate planning framework.

The Financial Management Improvement Program and Program Budgeting are complementary programs and amount to a system of performance-oriented management. Essentially, the system requires each department to structure its activities in terms of a number of hierarchically ordered programs and sub-programs. Goals and objectives, consistent with the broad aspirations of the government, are developed for the department as a whole and for each program. Objectives must be stated in a measurable form to permit subsequent assessment of performance. Financial and personnel resources are allocated on a program basis and linked to objectives. The program bids of departments are evaluated by Finance which then advises Cabinet's Expenditure Review Committee on the overall distribution of resources to federal agencies.

The new arrangements, therefore, are directed towards funding in terms of outputs and constitutes a significant departure from the previous procedure of input funding (or

line-item budgeting). The comprehensive planning required of departments is intended to inject a greater degree of rationality and efficiency into administrative processes and ensure that ministers are better informed when making major decisions over the direction of government policy.

One consequence of these reforms is that they are likely to have increased the level of competition between departments. The Financial Management Improvement Program and Program Budgeting were adapted from the private sector and are inherently competitive in nature. Programs must compete for resources within departments, and departments must compete with other departments. Increased devolution of responsibility and built-in performance incentives ensure that program controllers identify more closely with the objectives of their programs and have a personal stake in producing results. This move to corporate planning required a significant change in outlook on the part of senior personnel in most agencies. The extent of the rethinking that was necessary is indicated by the findings of a diagnostic study undertaken by external consultants in 1983. The study found that of twenty agencies surveyed, only one possessed a program evaluation unit (and this was a very recent development).[21] Furthermore, an examination of the mangement orientation of senior officials revealed:

> a main focus ... on inputs rather than outputs, with little awareness of outgoings. This meant that the prime concern for most managers was running programs rather than evaluating outcomes, so that the relevance of meeting overall objectives was low.[22]

The introduction of corporate planning, therefore, necessitated a major reorganisation in the structure and function of most departments. In the course of identifying organisational and program objectives senior personnel were forced to explore "what they are doing and why".[23] Such soul-searching inevitably heightens awareness of departmental space and territoriality. Indeed, this was one of the expected outcomes of the introduction of the Financial Management Improvement Program. Two of the intended "benefits" arising from the program were a greater "sense of direction" on the part of the department and "an understanding of the organisation's capabilities, strengths, weaknesses and working environments".[24] Territorial concerns may surface when a department's program overlaps with that of another department or where there is a dependency relationship involved. If the other department's activities interfere with the achievement of outcomes this may well have future consequences for resources allocation as the effectiveness of programs is "kept in mind" by Finance "when considering budgetary estimates".[25] With so much

at stake, boundary conflicts are likely to be strongly contested.

Boundary disputes over objectives, however, must be settled in the political arena as programs are mounted only within portfolio parameters and there is no administrative mechanism to evaluate competing claims between departments. Finance can coordinate programs within departments but, it noted somewhat ruefully, the "determination of program priorities *across* portfolios is ultimately a political decision" (emphasis added).[26]

Increased competition over aspects of tertiary education activity, however, was not the only outcome of the Hawke government's administrative reforms. The introduction of corporate planning also resulted in subtle changes in the balance of power between CTEC and other departments. First, in relation to DEIR, DITAC and Education the use of corporate planning strategies led to a greater degree of internal integration. All three agencies consisted of a number of functionally disparate divisions and branches which, prior to 1984, contributed to an often fragmentary approach to policy formulation and implementation. This was particularly the case with DEIR which was trenchantly criticised by the Kirby inquiry for its lack of coordination and "ad hoc" development of labour market programs.[27] Corporate planning resulted in the administrative restructuring of all three departments and determined attempts to secure the "commitment and

cooperation"[28] of subordinate staff and the "development of common aspirations among senior echelons of the Department".[29] It would be misleading to suggest that each department began to function as a coporate entity, but the changes certainly contributed to a much more cohesive outlook on policy matters, at least within divisions. This had ramifications for CTEC which found itself negotiating with senior personnel who possessed a more unified stance on issues.

A second area in which CTEC was probably diadvantaged by the administrative reforms was that funding in terms of effectiveness favoured those departments which could clearly define objectives and point to hard evidence of success. DEIR, for example, used quantitative indices in the form of the number of job placements made as one method of judging the achievements of labour market programs.[30] For CTEC's educational programs, on the other hand, multiple objectives and qualitative outcomes were often involved and "there are rarely any simple criteria for measuring success".[31] Clearly, in a climate of economic stringency and efficiency, programs that are obviously meeting objectives will carry considerable political weight. Not surprisingly, DEIR gave 'high priority' to "developing program performance indicators" during 1985/86.[32]

Finally, the position of Finance itself in the bureaucractic structure was considerably enhanced by the Hawke

government's reforms. Finance is now responsible for overseeing both financial and personnel allocations, placing it is a stronger position to evaluate the resource claims of departments. Program budgeting also permits a more comprehensive insight into the overall activities of agencies. These factors strengthen Finance's influence over the affairs of individual departments and the weight of its advice to the Expenditure Review Committee in relation to broader policy directions.

Structural change in the administrative environment

In addition to the weakening of inter-sectoral boundaries and the sharpened competitive edge between department, there also took place some redistribution in the financial and authoritative control for programs away from CTEC to external agencies. This was a consequence, partly of departments seeking to increase their source of influence over tertiary education policy, and partly as a result of structural change imposed by the government itself.

Probably the most salient example of an agency successfully gaining financial control of a tertiary education program was that of DEIR. DEIR began buying instruction from TAFE colleges for its labour market programs on a fee-for-service basis in 1981. The exercise started with only a smally outlay of $0.6million

but grew rapidly to $12.1million by 1984.[33] This respresented a substantial proportion of the commonwealth's totral recurrent funding to TAFE.

The scale of DEIR intervention increased dramatically with the release of the Kirby Inquiry's report on labour market programs in January 1985. One of Kirby's major recommendations was the establishment of the Australian Traineeship Scheme which would provide 16-17 year old school leavers with one year of paid employment and flexible on-the-job training. Incorporated into this year as to be 13 weeks of "broad based" education at TAFE college.[34] It was intended that graduates would have the opportunity to progress to more advanced areas of education, training or employment if they wished. Though oriented to the needs of industry, Kirby's main emphasis was on improving the longer-term "life chances" of individuals.[35]

This approach was consistent with the long-held views of CTEC and the TAFE sector, and CTEC's involvement was considered essential if the scheme was to be successfully integrated into the existing educational framework, particularly as 75,000 traineeships were envisaged by the end of 1988 with an estimated outlay of $100 million.

However CTEC, was subsequently excluded from the detailed formulation of policy for the implementation of the Traineeship scheme. After consultation with industry

groups, DEIR and the Department of Education succeeded in obtaining broad agreement for the introduction of the program. It was not until a draft submission was on its way to cabinet that CTEC was formally notified of the mounting of the scheme.[36] The overall outcome was that financial responsibility for the program rested firmly in the hands of DEIR and, in a more subordinate role, with Education. CTEC found itself with little influence over a new initiative which had "major implications" for the future development of the TAFE sector.[37] DEIR's determination to circumvent the Commission stemmed from considerable dissatisfaction on DEIR's part at the existing educational orientation of TAFE courses; an issue that will be taken up again later.

Following closely on the heels of DEIR in terms of territorial concerns was the Department of Education. In the early eighties the Department existed as "a large body lacking significant policy and administrative responsibilities" with its major functions consisting of distributing student allowances and acting as a support service for CTEC and the Schools Commission.[38] However, following the appointment in 1985 of its new Secretary, Helen Williams, Education underwent something of an identity shift. Under William's leadership the Department determinedly established a stake in a number of important tertiary education programs. These included contributing to the determination of policy for the TAFE Participation and Equity Program and assisting DEIR with the

Traineeschip scheme. The Overseas Student Office was located in Education to provide policy advice on foreign students and , in conjunction with the Department of Trade, made recommendations on the export of education services (introduced in l986). The Department also took the initiative in a number of other areas; one example was the setting up of its own education-industry liaison branch. In relation to CTEC particularly, Education adopted a much more independent stance. A whole division was established to scrutinize tertiary education policy and was referred to in bureaucratic circles as "CTEC's minders". Perhaps most indicative of the Department's new approach was that its 1985/86 Annual Report contained an unprecedented chapter devoted entirely to policy issues. Education, Williams wrote with some pride, had been "transformed" into a "potentially more effective" organization.[39]

This transformation had significant implications for CTEC. Not only did the Department have its fingers on the pulse of a number of strategic programs but it was also prepared to adopt a much more critical approach to CTEC's proposals.

A third area of major structural change in the tertiary education environment was the establishment of the Australian Research Council in the Ministry of Science. The new Council was proposed by the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC) late in 1986 to promote

higher education research in the "national interest" and to be responsible for making direct grants to institutions, encouraging industry liaison, and providing general policy advice.[40] It absorbed the functions of a number of small, scattered research funding bodies along with a portion of the grants CTEC allocated for research purposes.

The existence and role of the Council stemmed partly from a conviction by ASTEC itself of the need for a greater concentration of project monies, and partly from intense lobbying by DITAC and Science. Needless to say, CTEC was "implacably opposed"[41] to the creation of the new body and along with Education, engaged in a "major battle" over the issue with Science.[42] CTEC and Education lost the fight and Science got its Research Council (albeit for only two months or so). Clearly, however, the Council possessed the power to weild considerable influence over the direction of higher education research policy.

The establishment of the Office of Youth Affairs (OYA) in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in mid-1985 was another development which had ramifications for CTEC. The role of OYA to promote "Priority One Youth Australia" by integrating youth policies offered by DEIR, Social Security and Education as well as CTEC.[43] Though the Office possessed no direct control over financial resources, its views nevertheless carried considerable weight in the formulation of policies as a result of its

cross-sectoral knowledge of departmental activities and its centrality to major decision-making arenas.

In addition to the above, the Department of Trade maintained a strong interest in policy relating to the export of tertiary education courses (an initiative which it originally introduced). DITAC, for its part, established a scheme which directly financed industrial research experience for promising graduates and, early in 1987, had begun considering proposals to fund research projects in universities. Finally, the Commonwealth Department of Health became involved in the tertiary education sphere in 1985 following the government's decision to transfer nurse education from hospitals to CAEs. Health refused to loosen its control over commonwealth monies during the transition and effectively relegated CTEC's participation to that of "an advisory capacity only". As a result, the Commission was able to exert only minor influence over a policy initiative which had "far-eaching consequences" for the advanced education sector as a whole.[44]

The significance of all these developments is that they involved the movement of a number of federal departments - in a period of only two or three years - into areas of activity that would previously have been considered CTEC's preserve.

Channels of interaction

In a relatively short period of time, therefore, a considerable change took place in the administrative landscape surrounding CTEC. A number of agencies viewed the role of tertiary education institutions as impinging on their own sphere of interest and possessed the means to influence aspects of policy. Departments had variously gained control of financial resources, legal responsibility for programs or parts of programs, access to vital information, possessed alternative sources of specialist expertise, a central position in the structural framework, internal cohesion, or different combinations fo some of these. These attributes, scholars such as Allison[45], Rourke[46], Rhodes[47] and Warhurst[48] have noted, constitute important sources of power in the process of inter-departmental bargaining. (The relative status and ability of the presiding minister is a further factor). CTEC was forced to conduct the business of formulating policy in the context of a competitive bureaucratic environment.

The actual process of bargaining and exerting influence was complex, for departments were interested in different aspects of the tertiary pie and differed substantially in their views and the ends they sought. For example, both DEIR and DITAC were concerned with the provision of vocationally oriented education. DEIR, however, advocated a narrow job-specific approach and

had a reputation for regarding students as "units of labour" while DITAC tended to be supportive of academic excellence and the need for a broadly based, flexible educational experience.[49] Though DITAC agreed with Science on the importance of promoting tertiary education-industry liaison, Science also had a commitment to pure research. Finance adopted an overall perspective of the tertiary education portfolio in terms of efficient performance, but apparently little else. A widely held view was that, "Finance sees any cut as desirable; they don't care about policy". Treasury seemed to share much the same stance. Education continued to sympathize with CTEC on many issues but asserted its independence on such matters as increased industry relevance. The Office of Youth Affairs for its part, appeared to place equal emphasis on both employment outcomes and the need to foster the "social well-being of Young Australians" in its approach to policy.[50]

Agencies therefore focused on different areas of tertiary education activity and put forward differing views about the desirable direction of policy. There were a number of bargaining venues, both formal and informal where influence could be exerted. Formal venues comprised making submissions to CTEC, participating in inter-departmental committees (which grew considerably in number) and ad hoc committees, the official consultation process during preparation of the guidelines, cabinet subcommittees and cabinet itself (Painter and Carey

provide an interesting insight into the process of bargaining on inter-departmental committees)[51]. Informal venues involved meetings and telephone calls between senior officers, and between ministers. The ability of an agency to use the "bargaining advantages" available to it, to use Allison's term,[52] varied according to the issue in question, the venue concerned and the other departments which were participating. The outcomes of bargaining encounters also depended upon whether there was a coalition of interests on a particular matter. As mentioned above Science and DITEC formed an alliance to promote the establishment of the Australian Research Council. As will be seen, Finance, Treasury and DEIR coalesced on some issues as did CTEC and Education on others. Clearly there were a number of variables involved in determining when and how different agencies exerted influence.

An examination of all the interactions between departments, even if it were possible, is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the intention here is to indicate some of the different ways in which heightened inter-departmental competition affected the nature of policy outputs. It is argued, first, that one consequence was the emergence of incompatible policy directives from cabinet which hindered the ability of CTEC to accommodate official government objectives. Second, that this problem was accentuated by the erratic nature of the directives over time; the result of the differential power of

departments exercised in different arenas. The result of these developments was the weakening of the Commission's ability to undertake coherent policy development.

The Guidelines

The guidelines, as previously mentioned, constituted CTEC's formal policy directives as agreed upon by cabinet. In the early eighties the guidelines were based largely on the proposals put forward by CTEC in Volume 1 of its triennial submission, along with any alterations decided upon by cabinet. The outcome was usually a document that incorporated very broad requirements and which allowed CTEC considerable discretion during the implementation process.[53] From 1983, however, the guidelines became increasingly detailed in content, containing a range of disparate objectives which reflected the stances adopted by different agencies. There was little attempt to mould these demands into a coherent statement which was set in the context of the realities of available resources and the inherent limitations built into the tertiary education sector. Some departmental demands were negotiated during the process of preparing the draft guidelines for submission to cabinet (which was carried out bu the Department of Education). It appears however, that many demands ended up on the cabinet table itself where bargaining took place in earnest. Cabinet, for its part

seems to have been unwilling or unable to act as a forum for resolving competing departmental views into a workable policy document. The result was a patchwork of directives, loosely stitched together, that were often internally inconsistent and unrealistic in their expectations of what could be achieved.

Between 1983 and 1986 four sets of guidelines were issued to CTEC. Variously, these statements directed CTEC to: provide more places in tertiary institutions, improve access for disadvantaged students, increase the intake into business and technologically oriented disciplines, ensure that courses promoted the "full educational potential" of students as well as "provide the skills levels in the workforce essentialy to economic development"[54], forge closer links with industry and the broader social community, and maintain high academic standards. All this was to be achieved, of course, 'in the most cost effective manner'[55]. In addition, as a result of pressure from Finance, CTEC was required to report on the general effectiveness of higher education activity.

Had unlimited funds been made available many of these goals could have been secured. In fact CTEC received slightly less than half the increase in money it requested for the 1985-87 triennium[56], and the consequence was to create a fundamental incompatibility between several objectives. Though sufficient finance was provided to establish some 35000 new places over the triennium, this

number fell far short of actual demand (a factor that was at least partly due to the success fo the government's youth program which encouraged students to stay at school). The shortage of places forced up entry requirements at institutions and made access for disadvantaged persons difficult to obtain. Furthermore, the emphasis on youth (Priority One) meant that the vast majority of new places were allocated to school leavers and the opportunitites for mature age applicants were consequently reduced. Yet the great proportion of mature age students have traditionally come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The only way that both participation and equity objectives could be met, CTEC pointed out, was to increase the level of resources.[57]

Other directives in the guidelines were not only potentially incompatible but also contradicted long-established academic values. DEIR's view that priority should be given to the inculcation of vocational skills necessary for immediate economic development conflicted with DITAC's (and CTEC's) expectation that udnergraduates required a broad generalist education to ensure the flexibility and breadth of outlook needed to cope with longer term technological and social change. Promoting industrial liaison also presented a problem: too much emphasis on such activity could distract the energies of staff from "the needs of students and from the task of fundamental research"[58].

CTEC, therefore, was confronted with the difficult undertaking of reconciling a variety of disparate objectives with insufficient funds. More than this though, CTEC came under pressure from Finance to perform and to be seen to be performing. The Commission, in fact, was quite successful in devising a strategy that accommodated many of these demands. Funds available for new places over 1985-87 were directed largely to outer metropolitan and regional institutions, thereby providing improved geographical access for lower socio-economic areas. CTEC also attempted to implement a broad, longer-term plan of cross-sectoral development to foster increased participation and access. TAFE was identified as the 'stepping stone' for participation; the institutions where the traditionally disadvantaged are most likely to become involved in education[59]. As a result, emphasis was placed on expanding TAFE college facilities and introducing higher level courses. Successful TAFE students, it was envisaged, would be able to move on to studies in universities and CAEs. Transfer arrangements were also planned between outer-metropolitan and regional institutions and the well-established central campuses which offer the more professionally-oriented courses. The ideal was to provide a continuum of educational provisions across sectors which would greatly expand opportunity for access.

Further to these measures CTEC took action to encourage an increased orientation towards the needs of industry on

the part of institutions. Substantial growth was fostered in technological and business disciplines and two programs were mounted in CAEs and universitities to concentrate research expertise in fields of "national significance"[60].

Despite progess in these areas, however, CTEC experienced difficulty in implementing other apsects of its approach. For example, proposals that institutions should introduce more flexible entry requirements and facilitate transfer arrangements between campuses met with limited success. Attempts to impose further rationalization of study areas was also resisted in a number of quarters. Lack of headway with such matters was indicative of the inadequate time and funds available with which to respond to the range and scope of the directives contained in the guidelines. The pressure to act, furthermore, often resulted in hurried decisions and poor integration of important initiatives, creating resentment and opposition among administrators. In relation to one issue the Commission was forced to warn the government that "Major changes, if they are to be successful, require commitment and goodwill on the part of all those involved, not least those taking the political decisions"[61].

Exacerbating this situation was the unpredictable nature of the guidelines over time. Budgetary allocations were inconsistent and contradictory from year to year, creating great uncertainty for CTEC. A particularly salient

instance in this regard was the TAFE Participation and Equity Program. The Program was set up in 1983 to provide work-oriented training and educational opportunities for school leavers. It was the joint responsibility of DEIR, CTEC and Education: DEIR provided the income support for students, CTEC oversaw the instructional aspect, and Education coordinated and assisted with policy advice. Proudly introduced as the 'centre-piece' of the Hawke government's youth policy at its inception,[62] the Program's importance was reaffirmed in 1984 and funding increased by 13%. Yet less than a year later, in the May 1985 economic statement, its allocation was unexpectedly halved for the remainder of the triennium.[63] A similar fate awaited TAFE capital funding. An eight percent increase in outlays in the 1983 and 1984 guidelines was followed by a sudden and unpredicted cut of eight percent in the 1985 May economic statement.[64]

Both the TAFE capital program and the TAFE Pacticipation and Equity Program had been identified as cornerstones for the building of CTEC's wider participation and access strategy for the tertiary sector as a whole. Reducing the two grants half-way through their implementation not only affected TAFE directly but restricted the opportunity TAFE provided for alternative access to universities and CAEs.

CTEC's participation and access strategy received two further unexpected blows during 1986 and 1987. In 1986

the August budget imposed a $250 "administration charge" on tertiary students. This charge, the Commission subsequently warned, would have an impact on the access of part-time and external students particularly. Half a year later, in the May 1987 mini-budget, commonwealth recurrent funds for both TAFE and the higher education institutions received substantial cuts, effectively reducing their capacity to provide more places. Yet at the same time unemployment benefits for 16 and 17 years olds were removed and student allowances raised by one-third. The intention here was to encourage early school leavers to enrol in TAFE colleges and other school leavers to enrol in universities and CAEs. The fundamental contradiction of the two policy directives was summed up by an academic union representative when he pointed out that, "The Government cannot push young people to remain in the education system while at the same time reducing their real educational opportunities"[65].

Clearly, such chopping and changing in budgetary allocations and the imposition of incompatible demands and expectations made it very difficult for CTEC to effectively carry out all of the government's directives. Yet failure to achieve objectives was depicted as lack of responsiveness on the Commission's part.

Using alternative arenas

The erratic nature of the guideline's policy outputs can be attributed to a considerable extent to the ability of departments to utilize the bases of power available to them in different bargaining arenas to impose changes which were ultimately reflected in the guidelines. Perhaps the most salient example in this regard was the political strategy adopted by DEIR which was so successful that it ultimately captured a significant portion of CTEC's function.

As noted previously DEIR had, over the last few years, become heavily involved in the TAFE sector through its labour market programs. It funded half of the Participation and Equity Program and bought a number of courses from TAFE for its Trainseeships, as well as several other schemes. Though DEIR wielded considerable bargaining power through its control of financial resources, it nevertheless existed in a dependency relationship with TAFE for it relied on TAFE expertise to teach courses. This relationship was strained as the educational philosophies of DEIR and TAFE diverged substantially: DEIR's emphasis on immediate skill requirements conflicted with TAFE's long-cherished belief that courses must also foster the personal attributes of students. While DEIR could buy packages of education from TAFE and specify requirements, courses were taught by TAFE staff and could not be entirely divorced from

TAFE values. (TAFE, for its part, viewed the intrusion of fee-for-service instruction as divisive and disruptive.)

There was, therefore, a considerable incentive for DEIR to reduce this dependency relationship and exert greater control over the TAFE sector. It appears to have approached this task by adopting several strategies. First, it subtly highlighted the ineffectiveness of the TAFE Pariticipation and Equity Program in terms of employment outcomes, the Participation and Equity Program also embraced a wider range of educational goals such as the development of social awareness and self-esteem. These objectives, however, were somewhat vaguely stated, a problem that was accentuated by the variety of approaches taken by different states in the process of implementing the program.[66] Though the Participation and Equity Program received considerable commmunity support, statistical data had been lacking, making it difficult to identify specific achievements[67]. It is nevertheless clear that actual employment placings were low compared to other DEIR programs. Available statistics indicate that only about 20% of Participation and Equity graduates found jobs[68] compared with 58%, for example, of DEIR's Special Youth Employmemt Training Program[69]. Furthermore DEIR emphasised, where Participation and Equity Program employment rates were successful this was related to "the labour market relevance" of the particular courses provided[70]. The

message was clear: vocationally specific programs achieved the best employment results.

The second prong of the strategy adopted by DEIR was to mount labour market programs which effectively duplicated the Participation and Equity Program. Following the Kirby Inquiry the Department rationalised its existing offerings and introduced several new schemes. By 1986 there existed a number of clear alternatives to the Participation and Equity Program but which embraced a stronger vocational bias.[71]

Finally, DEIR seems to have formed an alliance with Finance and Treasury. All three departments supported the abandonment of the system of commonwealth grants to TAFE in favour of the fee-for-service principle.[72] CTEC would simply have been removed from the TAFE structure. From Finance's and Treasury's point of view such a change would have resulted in a more cost-efficient use of federal monies. For DEIR, obviously, it would have provided the opportunity for much greater control over the content of courses purchased. Undoubtedly the positions of Finance and Treasury were influenced by DEIR's success in producing hard performance indicators for many of its labour market programs. (Neither Finance nor DEIR were averse to publicly denigrating CTEC's activities. DEIR, for example, accused the Commission of building unnecessarily large and expensive TAFE college facilities - "Taj Mahals" - and

encouraging antiquated teaching methods - "chalk and talk")[73].

It seems likely that this coalition of interests was used in critical meetings of the Expenditure Review Committee to win gains at the expense of CTEC. This is suggested by the fact that the Traineeship scheme was introduced at precisely the time that the TAFE Participation and Equity Program funding was halved May 1985 and the trade-off in sums was roughly equivalent. Two years later, during preparation of the May 1987 mini-budget, "a major battle over expenditure funding" took place between the Minister of Education and the Expenditure Review Committee.[74] Though the Minsiter succeeded in minimising cuts to the education vote, the Review Committee nevertheless transferred some $30 million of TAFE recurrent monies to DEIR for its training programs. It is clear that members of the Committee were "strongly critical of education funding priorities" and agreed that "a strong case" existed for shifting CTEC's responsibility for TAFE to DEIR.[75] A working party consisting of representatives from Finance, Treasury, DEIR, Trade and Education was set up to prepare proposals for cabinet. It is most probably that the resulting cabinet submission recommended TAFE's transfer to DEIR for just before the July 1987 election CTEC had begun to publicly lobby against 'the removal of TAFE from education'[76].

DEIR's success at the Expenditure Review Committee is one example of a department using an alternative bargaining venue to achieve its objectives. The Committee consisted of the Prime Minister and the Ministers for Finance, DEIR, Treasury and Trade. The focus in this arena was economic as opposed to educational. The Committee came under intense pressure to reduce government outlays and Finance's views on the relative effectiveness of different departmental programs undoubtedly carried great weight in this regard. Given the complexity of issues involved and the deadlines which had to be met it is unlikely that the Committee had either the time or the inclination to consider the overall effects of its decisions on the tertiary education sector (or other sectors for that matter).

There were other departmental initiatives which were approved by the Committee without references to CTEC. These included the proposed reintroduction of tertiary fees (which was subsequently defeated by caucus), matters relating to fee-paying overseas students, the $250 administration charge, and the export of education services (about which CTEC was later consulted).

The Expenditure Review Committee was but one bargaining venue (albeit a very significant one) in which some departments could exercise influence and build coalitions to achieve particular outcomes in relation to tertiary education. There were many others distributed throughout

the administrative hierarchy. When the cumulative effect of these disparate decisions was eventually collected together and issued through the guidelines over time, it becomes clear why the guidelines contained contradictory and inconsistent directives. When a significant portion of policy was formulated in bits and pieces, and lacked a broad integrating framework it inevitably undermined the cohesion of CTEC's plans. A policy process such as this bears at least some of the characteristics of Graham Allison's "Governmental Politics" model in which critical decisions may be made in a number of uncoordinated venues and where policy outputs emerge in a piecemeal and disjointed fashion[77].

The end of CTEC

The creation of the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) as part of the Hawke government's restructuring of the public service following the July 1987 election was an acknowledgement that tertiary education policy-making had become fragmented and, to a considerable degree, unmanageable. Hawke himself emphasised that the new organization would "ensure better coordination of education policies".[78] DEET absorbed the whole of Education and the employment divisions of DEIR along with the Office of Youth Affairs from Prime Minister and Cabinet. The TAFE sector of CTEC was transferred two months later in September. Vince Fitzgerald, an "aggressive, upwardly mobile bureaucrat"

who had previously been secretary of Trade under Dawkins, was chosen to head the Department.[79]

It has been suggested that the attempt to weld Education and Employment - "two different bureaucratic cultures" - into a coherent organization "is perhaps the toughest task in the restructuring"[80]. This observation, however, ignores the integrating effect that corporate planning strategies will have on amalgamation procedures. Indeed, one of Fitzgerald's initial actions was to 'set in train work on a corporate plan for DEET'[81]. It seems unlikely that the Hawke government would have embarked on such radical changes to the public service had not management instruments such as program budgeting and the Financial Management Improvement Program already been well in place.

There is no indication that the complete removal of CTEC was ever an intended outcome of the government's restructuring. Yet once under way, the nature of events quickly undermined the viability of the Commission. Perhaps the most significant occurrence in this respect was the placement of the Australian Research Council. It will be recalled that this body had gone to the Science portfolio just before the election. Science was subsequently subsumed by DITAC during the restructuring and the whole question of the location of the Research Council was again reopened. Not surprisingly CTEC lobbied Dawkins to establish the Council as a standing committee

within the Commission. This proposal, however, was vigorously rejected by Finance and CITAC which were opposed to CTEC "having any role" in the Council. The Commission, they claimed, had 'a very poor record' in terms of managing research funding.[82] This view appears to have won the day for Dawkins located the Council in the DEET portfolio. The Council was to be an advisory body only; the actual allocation of research funding was to be carried out by DEET.

The positioning of the Research Council accentuated what was already a major shift in the locus of responsibility for tertiary education policy-making away from CTEC. The authority for a substantial number of important programs - TAFE colleges, labour market programs, industry liaison, overseas students, the export of education services, income support - now resided in a single structure. CTEC was effectively left with the limited function of formulating and implementing nuts and bolts policies for universities and CAEs. To a considerable extent the Commission's role would be contingent on the actions of DEET. Such a situation undermined much of the rationale for having a statutory authority. Furthermore, it was an unsatisfactory arrangement with which to promote cross-sectoral development between TAFE colleges and other higher education institutions. From an administrative perspective it made sense to locate responsibility for all three tertiary sectors in DEET.

The end of CTEC was announced in mid-October 1987. In its place will be the National Board of Employment, Education and Training which will be supported by four subordinate councils: the School Council, the Higher Education Council, the Employment and Skills Formation Council and the Australian Research Council. All five bodies possess advisory powers only. The business of formulating and implementing policy rests with DEET.

The Commission's demise was the culmination of several years activity on the part of a number of federal departments which gradually eroded and dispersed many of CTEC's traditional policy-making functions. The very nature of these activities - along with the direct aspersions cast by several agencies - questioned the Commission's competence in a variety of areas and this undoubtedly helped to sour the perceptions of political actors about the value of CTEC's continued existence. Effectively, sections of the commonwealth bureaucracy had created an administrative environment which made it very difficult for the Commission to survive.

Conclusions

Though the concentration of functions in DEET will greatly improve the coherence and integration of policy outputs, it is unlikely that the new structure will be able to operate as a relatively self-contained sector. Over the last few years the parameters of tertiary education policy-making have grown in breadth and complexity to such an extent that they now involve a variety of previously detached policy arenas. Universities and colleges, moveover, have become identified as an important economic resource which may be utilized in the pursuit of diverse organizational goals. It seems probable that federal departments such as Industry, Technology and Commerce, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Finance, Treasury and Community Services and Health will seek to influence the direction of policy.

Yet there are still no suitable administrative mechanisms for mediating inter-departmental differences. The corporate management strategies introduced by the Hawke government appear to encourage competition between agencies without providing a satisfactory means for resolving disputes. A significant aspect of the problem is that agencies must arrange their functions into a program format but are not required to prioritize the relative value of programs and sub-programs. All activities, therefore, tend to be defended with equal determination. This factor

increases the range and detail of issues that must be sorted out in political venues such as the Expenditure Review Committee and Cabinet. While there may now be fewer departments in Canberra, it is not necessarily an indication that conflict over tertiary education policy will lessen.

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