

Address to the Higher Education HR Conference

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‘Bradley — The Report We Had to Have’

by Don Aitkin

It is a pleasure to have been asked to give this address, though the timing is awkward. Australia is going through an almost unprecedented economic downturn, and it is by no means clear when things will return to what younger generations will regard as ‘normal’. I have said that this downturn is ‘almost unprecedented’, and I should explain that while the prospects of another depression to rival that of the 1930s are before us, the differences will be that today’s society is much better educated than the society of the interwar period, and that the role of the education system, at every level, will be much more important in the recovery.

My address has five parts. The first considers the frequency with which we have reviews of higher education. The second analyses the terms of reference given to the Bradley review, while the third discusses its argument and recommendations. The fourth considers what we know of the government’s likely response, and the concluding fifth contains some reflections of my own on the academic career and industrial relations in universities.

Reviews and more reviews

It is a commonplace within higher education that our sector is the most reviewed part of Australian life, and that may well be true. Whether or not we are at the top of that pole, there are several reasons why we are so often reviewed, and each is an important underpinning of the Bradley Review.

The large number of reviews, incidentally, is not another example of academic complaint: it is simply a fact. The sector and its component institutions have been reviewed, in one form or another, about every three years since 1950, when the Commonwealth Government established a Committee of Enquiry under the Chairmanship of Professor R. C. Mills. Two years later the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee asked the Commonwealth to do another review, and the result was the Murray Committee, which among other things recommended the establishment of the Australian Universities Commission, which went around Australia reviewing universities every three years and making recommendations to the Commonwealth Government about what should happen, and how much that would cost. In 1977 the Commonwealth Tertiary Education

Commission replaced the AUC, and CTEC's constituent councils also went on a three-year reviewing cycle. CTEC was abolished in 1988, as part of the changes initiated by Minister John Dawkins, and the pace of reviewing picked up. While the Commonwealth maintained triennial funding, review teams went out every year for a while until the new unified national system settled down. In the 1990s we had the Baldwin review, which established quality audits (every year for a part of the system), and the Hoare review while several reviews since have looked at research in universities, teaching and learning invigilations, infrastructure bids, and so on. All these endeavours, and the bidding process involved in research grants and infrastructure, amount to reviews; the more competitive the system, in respect of the way government allocates funding, the more reviews there are, for each allocation is based on some kind of review.

The sheer number tells you that something about higher education is remarkable, for reviews usually lead to change, and such change is usually destabilising. If, for example, there were a review into Treasury every three years we would be asking what was wrong with it. So, what is wrong with the higher education system that causes review after review? Let me digress for just a moment to note that the late Peter Karmel, arguably the most important figure in higher education in the second half the 20th century, would happily deny that there was such a 'system'. There were only universities, he said. In my view this was a kind of special pleading: the names of the Commonwealth bodies implied a system, as did funding rules and outcomes. And the notion of higher education's being a system certainly runs throughout the Bradley Report. Now back to the reasons for the numerous reviews. My candidate reasons, most of which will be familiar to an audience like this, follow.

First, the system has grown rapidly for more than half a century. In all three-year periods, I would think, the system was larger in some sense than it had been before, demanded more funding, and had newer problems along with the old. From a position on the periphery of Australian society in 1950, higher education is absolutely mainstream today. A few comparisons make the change very obvious. In 1951 eight universities and three small university colleges (in Canberra, Armidale and Newcastle) prepared 32,000 students for a small range of professional careers. Fifty years later the 81,000 staff in 40 public higher education institutions, two private universities (Bond in Queensland and Notre Dame in Western Australia) and a small retinue of specialised colleges, like the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, the Australian Maritime College and the National Institute of Dramatic Art, taught nearly 850,000 students. Higher education is about 30 times larger than it was in 1950, and if you allow for population growth, it is still ten times bigger.

Second, the budgetary implications of that growth affected every Commonwealth government from the early 1960s, even though the Commonwealth Government had a useful annual fiscal increment from the end of the second world war until the mid 1970s. While every government could say the right things about the importance of education, and of higher education, there is not an unlimited amount of money for it, or for any other element of our society. Some kind of assessment of what was really needed, and what the government could afford, was therefore needed.

Third, our sense of what higher education was ‘for’ has changed substantially over the past sixty years. It was once seen as the means by which the country acquired its small cadre of highly educated professionals — doctors, teachers, engineers, architects and so on. Given their small numbers and their effect for good across Australia it was thought reasonable for the rest of society to pay for their necessary education and training. Then came the view that everyone who could go to university should do so, because it was good for them. Again, they would contribute, so society should pay. Then more and more of the old professions moved their training from the professional workplace (as with accountants, lawyers and nurses) to the university. Then came the new professions, like information technology, management and tourism: their education and training began in the university.

Fourth, these changes have themselves been the consequence of an extraordinary increase in the sum of human knowledge, which I would estimate as being about a hundred times greater than it was in 1950. We are now all specialists of one kind or another, and the university has been the home of the specialisms, because all of them have flowed from research, often done in universities, and are affected, almost on a daily basis, by new knowledge, often produced in universities. So universities now offer a staggeringly large number of courses, degrees, diplomas and short courses, aimed at, and sought by, people working in jobs that did not exist ten years, or twenty or thirty years ago.

Fifth, governments trying to grapple with nation-building — or with competition in the new global world — turned to the universities as though they were instruments in that government endeavour — or perhaps levers, or weapons, aids, strategies. There have been many metaphors. Research, once miscalled ‘pure’ by those who thought it was their private property, became affected by government attempts to have research done in areas that they thought to be important now or in the future. Researchers, who mostly don’t care what their research is called as long as they get the money to do what they want, rallied to the new cause. Governments found that the most immediate outcome of any piece of funded research is a request for more money to do the follow-up.

Sixth, if all this were not enough, members of parliament for the most part have not much liked the experience they themselves had at university (if they went there at all). The reason is that academics have traditionally paid greatest attention to their honours or distinction students, whom they see as future academics. Pass students have always had a raw deal, and the lack of decent funding for teaching has exacerbated the problem, since about half all the teaching that is done in today’s universities is delivered by staff employed on a casual basis. Most MPs and Ministers have been pass students. You can get some sense of what I would call an antipathy to universities through the fact that some Liberal politicians tend to talk about the universities as hotbeds of the Left, while Labor politicians can refer to them as finishing schools for silvertails. While these old forms of thought are likely to decline as the proportions attending higher education increase, it is plain to me that very few MPs or Senators defend universities from attack, and I can report from my own knowledge that none did during the Dawkins changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Finally, we live in a country that is subject to three-year cycles in elections and budgets, so that it is not entirely strange that we get three-year reviews of higher education, given what I have been saying. New Ministers need a breathing space before they can talk confidently about their new responsibility, and a review is a handy device for learning without making gaffes: all questions can be deferred ‘until the review has been completed and I have studied the report’. A review report can then be studied for at least a few months, which provides further time for reflection.

Let me sum up this section by saying that higher education has become very important indeed in contemporary Australia, and its passage to that status has been accompanied by a felt need on the part of government to find out what universities are doing, affect that state of affairs, find the minimum necessary level of funds to achieve the government’s purpose, and hope that things go reasonably well until the next review. I might finish by saying that such reviews are much less frequent in, say, health, where demands and needs are comparable, because the organised medical profession is much more powerful than organised vice-chancellors, let alone than organised academics. No politician I have ever spoken to appeared at all worried by the prospect of resistance or electoral combat from either staff unions or the AVCC. We might think about why that could have been so.

The Bradley Review’s terms of reference

We do not need to go into a long analysis of the intent of the Terms of Reference. The gist is there in the first paragraph: the Review is to report on ‘the future direction of the higher education sector, its fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy and the options for ongoing reform’. To which we should add the fourth paragraph:

‘In particular, the Review Panel will examine the current state of the Australian higher education system against international best practice and assess whether the education system is capable of:

- contributing to the innovation and productivity gains required for long term economic development and growth; and
- ensuring that there is a broad-based tertiary education system producing professionals for both national and local labour market needs.’

The Reviewers were given seven additional themes that could structure their comment on ‘future key objectives for higher education in Australia’. My summary of them is that they represent the usual suspects: access and equity, diversity, response to changing student demand, international competitiveness, and what is now called ‘quality’, but should be called ‘high quality’. One element that to me was both new and much to be welcomed was that the Reviewers should locate higher education and VET in an over-arching ‘broader tertiary education sector’, and develop an integrated relationship between higher education and VET.

My principal comment here is to emphasise the change that has occurred in the past sixty years. I think it is fair to say that the Bradley Terms of Reference would have been unthinkable in 1950. The phrases used, like ‘fitness for purpose’, ‘international best practice’ and ‘globally focussed’ — indeed the whole text of the Terms of Reference — are very much in the contemporary idiom, and would have been almost meaningless in 1950. In contemporary Australia the university is clearly there to serve national, social and economic purposes. It needs to be productive, innovative, responsive to student demand, and to have a clear and distinctive mission. I can imagine my elders and betters in the 1950s reading these words and wondering what on earth they meant and how they could have any meaning for the newly created University of New England. I ought to say, nonetheless, that I think the contemporary idiom is correct for our times, and that the Bradley Reviewers were given, in large part, the riding instructions they ought to have been given. For some twenty years and more now, I have been arguing that universities need always to be renegotiating their existence.

I grew up in a university world in which, perhaps because we were so separate from the mainstream, the university world could define itself as the guardian of knowledge, the home of learning, and the protector of truth and beauty. It followed that the academic staff were the centre and point of the university, and since I slowly became aware that I could be part of that group, I found this quite attractive and reassuring. I think that those days passed steadily as we moved through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Today, it is the students who are the centre of the university, and the society as a whole that is its point. If you ask why that is so, the answer is that the students provide, directly or indirectly, a significant part of the funding of the university, while the society, through the federal government, provides much of the rest. There are some of my age-group who find this change detestable. But there is not much they can do about it. My own view is that the change became inevitable once university education became an almost universal aspiration, and public funding through taxation became significant. Since I approve of both changes, I had hardly disapprove of their concomitant.

The Bradley Report

The Bradley Report has received a generally favourable press. There are some who do not think it has gone far enough, and others who think that its emphases and priorities are misplaced. Denise Bradley herself says that there is something in it for everybody to hate. Like almost all reports, it begins with a claim that the present time is the most important time of all. It argues that our higher education system has great strengths and faces great challenges, which demand decisive action and more money. It says we are falling behind other countries in our performance and investment. At once the Reviewers are in a kind of argumentative bog. If Australia has great strengths in its higher education system — and on the evidence it has — then what does it mean to say that it is falling behind? International data about almost everything are rather unsteady bases for comparison. If Australia has slipped from 7th out of 30 to 9th out of 30 a decade later, this is not a slide that makes me, at any rate, deeply concerned. Given the great difficulty in comparing what we do in Australia to, for example, what the Swedes do in Sweden, I would think we were still jogging along somewhere around the bottom of the top third. I’m not sure

where you would think we ought to be, and how much money it would take to get us up to, say, 5th, and whether the expenditure would be worth the outcome, given the opportunity costs of such expenditure, always supposing that governments had the capacity to find it.

The Report does point to some worries on the horizon, and the generally poor morale in universities. I would have to say that I'm not sure that morale is any poorer there than in, say the public services of our country: the Australian workforce generally is working longer hours per week than was the case in the 1980s. But I agree that it is important to address 'these complex issues', and I'll say more about all this later. I would also agree that the quality of the educational experience of today's undergraduates is likely to be inferior to that gained by the cohorts who attended university before the introduction of HECS. On the other hand, the numbers gaining university experience have increased markedly. What would we rather have? More with less, or fewer with more? I prefer the former, in part because I want an Australia in which every adult is well-educated, even if, as was the case with part-time students when I was young, many will as a result not have an undergraduate experience where they argued about the meaning of life, and had some spare time to do so in. Today's undergraduates typically work for wages as well as carry a full-time academic load. I did not have to do that, but I will not say that their experience in having to do it must therefore be intellectually, temperamentally or emotionally impoverishing.

The Bradley Report is solid in arguing that we should invest more in higher education — indeed, that we should see public funding in higher education as a form of investment rather than as a form of expenditure. Here, there is virtually universal support within the system, and it includes me. I think the Report is correct in singling out the need to improve the amount we invest in university teaching, and to reduce the proportion of university teaching that is carried out by casual staff. I would think that most vice-chancellors would agree with me, and when I was one we seemed always between a rock and a hard place in trying to maintain a 70 per cent figure for full-time academic staff and a bottom line than was decreasingly able to allow us to satisfy that goal. Bradley also proposes that students carry in their briefcases the money that the government will provide to their university of choice. Such a 'voucher' system has been talked about for the past twenty years, and I am no longer opposed to it.

I do part company with the Bradley reviewers when they get into the business of regulation. We Australians were once said to have a passion for 'bureaucracy', and that description was not meant nastily. Rather, bureaucracy was seen as likely to produce generally equal outcomes. But the downsizing and reduced esteem for the public service that has occurred over the last two decades has left us instead with what looks like a passion for regulation. Instead of government's trying to decide what should happen, in education, health, transport or whatever, the impetus now is to hand the problem on to the area concerned, but say 'Get it right, or we'll thump you!' The amount of time that university senior staff spend on what I would call 'compliance' is now much greater than it once was. Senior staff report on all matter of things to government, and junior staff report on what they are doing in order that the seniors can fill in the forms. This is not a

phenomenon reserved for universities alone. It is also widespread in the schools, and in hospitals — and, I should imagine, in most parts of our society that depend on public funding.

I had hoped that the Bradley Review would ask for this mostly unproductive apparatus of forms to be dispensed with, or at least greatly reduced. Alas, the Report proposes even more regulation. Now I can accept that the large number of private providers and the fact of eight states and territories causes some confusion in the system. But the problems that people reported to the Review would in many cases not have been solved by more regulation, but only by governments moving faster to make decisions. After 55 years in and around the higher education system, I am deeply sceptical that more regulatory systems achieve much more than make the regulators feel that somehow they are achieving something. As we have seen in other domains of Australian life, having a regulator is not enough. The regulator has to be brave, strong and protected by the government from attack by those regulated. I see no sign that these conditions are likely to be about now or in the future.

Bradley's Recommendations 19 and 20 call for the Australian Government to adopt a new framework for higher education accreditation, quality assurance and regulation, in which a national regulatory body accredits and reaccredits all providers of higher education, including universities (on a ten-year cycle), conducts regular quality audits, provides advice to the government on quality, effectiveness and efficiency, and regulates what is offered to international students. Some will see this as a move back to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, but I feel that I should warn that in the context of the over-regulated system we now have, the proposed body would be much bigger, much more powerful and much less open to change than CTEC ever was. My own view is that those working in the system need less regulation, not more, and that we should trust professionals to do their jobs professionally, not suspect them, from the beginning, of a desire to engage in malpractice. I recall a moment in the AHEIA's history (I was then on its Board) of a discussion about annual increments. One of our number thought that every staff member's entitlement to an annual increment be subject to the report of a formal inquiry. I thought of my own place, and how many dodgy staff I might have who would get an increment without really deserving it — maybe one in a hundred. I asked the man who made the suggestion how many undeserving staff might be found in his university. 'One or two per cent,' came the reply. Building a regulatory system to ensure that one or two in a hundred do not get an undeserved increment seems to me to carry good process to a ludicrous extreme. Our society has lost its trust in professionals. I think it would have been better for the Bradley Reviewers to propose possible means whereby we could regain some of that trust, rather than to build a super-CTEC to ensure that every higher education provider is squeaky clean.

If there is any doubt about what I am saying, my general recommendation in this area would have been as follows: leave the universities alone to work out how best to teach their students, engage in research, pay their staff and build their resources. Interfere as little as possible. Each new form of interference, however well-meant, adds a cost to the public purse in establishing the interferers, and reduces the productivity of the

universities, whose staff have to engage in essentially unproductive activity to meet their demands. Let me give an example. Recommendation 7 proposes that all higher education providers administer the Graduate Destination Survey, the Course Experience Questionnaire and the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement. I spent a good deal of my research life in the field of survey research, and I never had a great deal of time for the Course Experience Questionnaire as it was used. I thought it was a good idea in principle, and that all universities should find out from their students what they felt about the quality and quantity of teaching that they had received. But to use the same questionnaire for each university, and to assume that the distribution of responses across similarly-named faculties or courses amounts to a meaningful comparison (so that University A is seen to be teaching better than University B), struck me then, and strikes me now, as deeply unintelligent, almost a travesty of good practice.

Our higher education system, in my view, presently emphasises and exhibits competition more than it does collaboration. I think that is a pity. But if I am right in thinking that it does, then we would do best by letting the competitive spirit that it is there lead universities to find out and imitate best practice wherever they can. That leads me to provide two further pieces of unasked-for advice. The first is that universities should recognise that everything they do could be done better, and search for ways to bring better practice about. But the attempt on the part of any government to try and reduce everything that is done in the higher education system to some kind of n by n matrix, whose numbers show without question which are the under-performing institutions, is fundamentally misconceived. Universities are naturally untidy places, and attempts to make them tidy and act in the same way will not succeed. Worse, such attempts are likely to reduce productivity, efficiency and effectiveness, not improve them.

By saying this I am not proposing that universities abandon measurement. Indeed no. Measurement is deeply important. But my second piece of advice to universities is that they measure what they value, so that they do not have to value what others measure. I would much rather see that all universities were engaged in measuring student satisfaction with teaching (while not accepting that students are either the best or the only judges of the effectiveness of teaching) than that universities were all doing it the same way.

My final comment about the Bradley Report's recommendations is the set connected with Vocational Education and Training and its interconnection with higher education. Here the Bradley Reviewers want the Australian Government in time (2010 is mentioned, but I think it will take a good deal longer than this) to accept the responsibility for vocational education and training, fund it properly, ensure that VET students have access to the same sort of income support that university students get, and establish a single ministerial council covering all states, and territories, as well as the Commonwealth, to cover all tertiary education and training. I support all of this, and hope that our government follows these recommendations.

I have left this area to last, but then so did Bradley, and before it so did the Commonwealth, as the need to look at VET was the second-last of the themes in the

Terms of Reference. In some respects this is the most novel aspect of the review, and it is the first time, I think, when anyone has suggested, in effect, that we should drop the status distinctions between, ‘higher’ and (by extension) ‘lower’ education, and simply talk about ‘post-secondary’ or ‘tertiary’ education. It may seem strange for a research-based academic-turned-vice-chancellor to talk this way, but for some twenty years now I have seen TAFE as the unnecessarily poor cousin of universities, and that what are essentially status distinctions prevent our country’s having both a much better outcome from its educational systems and a much healthier society.

Without giving you a long lecture on the subject, it is my firm view that all babies (save those born with significant birth defects) are equipped with all the talents needed to help them achieve satisfactory careers in almost any skill and any intellectual calling. That they do not all become surgeons, novelists or plumbers is not a function of something called intelligence, but a function of upbringing, sibling order, role modelling by parents, and varying levels of love and encouragement. But our school systems necessarily place high value on the early acquisition of basic intellectual skills, which we call reading, writing and arithmetic, and before long kids are placed in advanced classes if they are quick to demonstrate those skills, while the skills of the hand with the mind develop more slowly, as the body grows. By the later years of high school the notion is well established that the ‘bright’ kids are in the classes doing advanced maths or languages or history, while the others are learning a trade. Some of you will know that there are now more university graduates involved in TAFE courses than there are TAFE graduates enrolled in university courses. I think that it is high time that we recognised that all of us benefit from the skills that involve the use of our hands as well the skills to do with the use of our minds, and that our society needs both, all the time. The Bradley Report, to repeat, points in the right direction, and its recommendations here are a good first step.

The Government’s Response to Bradley — so far

The Government has not announced its detailed response to the Bradley Report, and my guess is that it will be a while before it does so. The Minister, Julia Gillard, has made the very fair point that the Review was initiated in ‘easier economic times’, and her government is now preoccupied with much more difficult questions than with how to tweak high education so that it performs better. Nonetheless, Minister Gillard has made several speeches about aspects of the Bradley Report, and I have not found anything in them that is at odds with the Bradley recommendations. She has accepted the need for an over-arching regulatory framework, for the goals of participation and access, and for what I would call a voucher system. The closest I could find to a qualification with any aspect of the Report is in her speech of 5 March at the Big Skills Conference about VET — that while she wants ‘a national system’ of technical training, ‘states must remain as major funders and owners of facilities, and important contributors to policy’. What that might mean in practice I’m not sure; no doubt we shall see in good time. As for funding, she could argue that her government has already pushed through more than \$1.5 billion into the tertiary education system in the \$4.7 billion infrastructure package announced last December, and that might be enough to chew on for the moment while the government puts time into solving the recession that no one thought that we had to have.

In fact, time is crucial. I think it is fair to say that while the Rudd Government appears to be happy with the broad thrust of the Bradley Report, its aims and its suggestions, there is no money now to implement any of its important innovations, and unlikely to be any until the downturn has become a sustained upturn. I have no present feeling about when that might be, and those of my friends who are thought to be knowledgeable about such matters vary greatly about how long they think the recession we have entered will last. It might follow that those parts of the Report that do not need special or increased funding are likely to be implemented reasonably quickly, while those parts that require lots of money are not. I would add that anything that requires detailed legislation will probably need to join a longish queue, because the Government's preoccupation with the possibility that Australia will enter not just a recession but a genuine depression, means that the legislative program focuses very largely on economic matters of the immediate moment, whereas the Bradley Report is very much about investing for the future.

In summary, the Bradley Report, which is ambitious and far-reaching, has arrived at a most inopportune time with respect to implementation, which is likely to be slow and poorly financed. The slowness of attention and implementation makes it quite possible that Bradley will be superseded by another review in a few years' time. I explained at the beginning of this address why we have so many reviews, so you have been warned!

A final comment on industrial relations

At the end of the Bradley Report are some 1100 index entries. 'Industrial relations', 'unions' and 'human resources' do not score a single mention. Section 3.1.5, on the academic workforce, does consider aspects of the working life in universities that are of interest to this audience. Since you will all have read this section with care I need only summarise it. The academic staff of Australia's universities, and I would think also of its VET sector and its schools, have an older age-structure than that of the workforce as a whole. The main reason is that forty years ago education grew very rapidly as a sector, and drew in as staff people of much the same age. Many of those people are now in senior positions. While this demographic pattern represents a great opportunity ahead for today's younger academic staff, the academic career has ceased to be attractive to sufficient able young people for all the vacancies ahead to be filled.

Why is academia today relatively unattractive? The Bradley Report points to unimpressive salaries, depressed working conditions and the general casualisation of the academic workforce: about half of the teaching now delivered in Australia's universities comes from sessional and fixed-term staff. It warns that we cannot expect to deal with the likely shortfall by opening the staffing of our universities to the world, as we did in the 1960s and 1970s. There is now a global market for good academic staff, as we know to our cost, for many Australians now hold chairs in North America, the UK and Europe. Why would clever and well-trained American, Canadian, British and European academics want to come here? Adventure and sun seem to me to be the only factors likely to attract a few. There is no longer the Vietnam draft to induce US citizens to emigrate, while the general conditions of life for knowledge-workers throughout the

developed world are now much the same. Indeed, one could argue that phenomena like ‘casualisation’ are becoming worldwide too, but that does not make Australia any more attractive as a destination.

In short, we have a problem, and the downturn is only likely to exacerbate it. I focussed on the amount of time and energy that goes into compliance in part because it is one area in which government could make working conditions and even the casualisation of the profession less of a problem. But, as I have explained, Minister Gillard has accepted that Australia needs an overarching regulatory system for higher education, and that can only mean more compliance and less money available in the system for teaching and learning. If the asked-for injection of money to improve staff-student ratios does not appear quickly, and I cannot see that it is likely to, then the casualisation problem will only get worse. It is not clear to me what the best strategy for universities is likely to be, especially as the next enterprise bargaining round gets under way later this year.

What we are seeing, I think, is a slow and probably irreversible change in the academic career, and what it means to be a ‘professional’ in academia. As this organisation pointed out in its own submission to the Bradley review, our universities employ people in a number of ways that had no real counterpart in, say, the 1970s. Some academic staff are on contracts but not either full-time or part-time, and some deliver services that are neither clearly academic nor ‘general’ in their nature. Our system is returning to the interwar period when working professionals in other fields gave some of their time to teach undergraduates. Some of the teaching involved in degree courses now occurs in industry or in some partnership context in which the university and a business or NGO agree to work this way.

On the face of it, these new ways of providing teaching and learning are here to stay, and if there is no new money to support what the AHEIA in its submission called ‘the standard model’, then I foresee a higher education system in which young people acquire their higher degrees but have no intention of having a lifelong career as an academic. Rather, they will spend a few years as a staff member, but then take advantage of another career opportunity, and leave academia — perhaps to return to a more senior position at a later time, perhaps not. All this will change the ways in which we manage universities. It will change the relationship that vice-chancellors have with their staff. It will change the preoccupations of staff associations and unions. It will change the experience that students have.

There is a strong tendency in higher education, not just here, but everywhere I have been, to regard the present as an unfortunate aberration from a past time when the university was the way universities should be. I am not one who thinks like that, even though I remember the 1960s with particular affection, as a time when almost everything seemed possible. On all the evidence, the Australian university system is an excellent one in world terms, and we have built it well. The Bradley Report points out, nonetheless, that it could do with real improvements in some areas, and in general I think the analysis is sound. But I doubt that this is going to be the time when those real improvements are made. I think that is a great pity.

