

*A critical policy analysis of the Crossroads Review:  
Implications for higher education in regional  
Western Australia*

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### *Declaration*

I declare that the work presented in this dissertation is the result of my own research. The material has been prepared expressly for this dissertation and has not been presented to any other university or institution for any other degree or award.

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## Abstract

This work is a critical policy analysis of the *Crossroads* Review, especially those aspects of it that are most likely to have a significant impact on higher education in regional Western Australia. It aims to understand the place of higher education in regional Western Australia historically with a view to critiquing current policy directions and the potential consequences of *Crossroads*. The thesis argues that the ideologies of marketisation and corporatisation are driving current higher education policy and this may significantly damage the long-term viability of regional campuses and learning centres as well as public and private funding allocations. The implications for the dismantling of the social contract (or social democratic settlement) in the knowledge economy is an important issue for regional populations for their continued growth, health, education and welfare.

The issues examined here are relevant to regional higher education in this State. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the potential policy effects with regard to accessibility of higher education in regional Western Australia. The thesis analyses the advantages and disadvantages of studying in regional WA in the current policy environment where there has been a dramatic shift in ideology from the welfare state to economic rationalism. Factors that impact on higher education in regional Western Australia include the provision of telecommunications services for access to and participation in the knowledge economy.

The thesis considers the evolution of higher education in Australia in general and more particularly in Western Australia, as it has evolved since its foundations in the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this time there have been radical changes in higher education in Australia in line with changes to our society and its place in an increasingly globalised environment.

The thesis concludes by considering some possible options for the future such as the development of learning communities and branch campuses. In discussing such possible alternative forms of delivery of higher education to regional Western Australia, this thesis seeks to raise awareness in relevant government bodies and in rural and remote communities of their particular higher education needs. It is hoped also to encourage regional communities to become more confident and pro-active in their own endeavours to gain greater access and equity in higher education.

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## Chapter one – introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the thesis and provides an overview of the research methodology, structure and basis for a social justice interpretation of higher education policy in regional Western Australia. For the purposes of this work, ‘regional’ is defined as areas outside of the metropolitan area. This study is a critical policy analysis of the *Crossroads* Review and the policies and events leading to the far-reaching changes proposed by it. It is concerned with higher education policy in Australia and its impact on regional Western Australia. It examines the history of higher education in Australia as a whole and the social and political events that have shaped and affected it.

This study takes the view that neoliberal theories of economic rationalism have adversely impacted on society and higher education in regional Australia. As Polanyi wrote sixty years ago, if we allow the marketplace to dominate our society, we will ultimately destroy it (George, 1999:1). This study examines the changes that have occurred over recent decades through successive government policies and practices that have sought to marketise and corporatise higher education. The evidence utilised is contained in official reports, published works and white papers with particular attention being paid to the recent Nelson *Crossroads* Review (2002-2003). This thesis argues that these papers and the implementation of the proposed policies and practices laid out in them are likely to lead to a radical restructuring of higher education with significant consequences for regional higher education in Western Australia.

Any changes that are made to our higher education system are likely to affect all Australians, whether or not they choose to undertake higher education. The

changes will not only affect this country's standard of higher education, but will also determine where future university campuses are established and funded, what type of institutions they are, or become, and who can, or cannot, access or afford to attend them. Higher education plays a significant role in shaping the social, political and economic values of its society and the individuals within it. Consequently, these changes will also determine what kind of society Australia will become in the twenty-first century. For regional Australians this is especially important as, in the past, they have had limited access to higher education and therefore lower participation and completion rates. This, in turn, has impacted on the knowledge, economic capital and viability of regional communities (Callaghan, 26 June 2002:2-3, Parliament of Australia, 2000:Ch.9).

The *Crossroads* Review and the proposed changes to higher education put forward by the Honourable Minister for Education (Federal), Dr Brendan Nelson are the main focus of this study. It is now three years since the first of the *Crossroads* Review papers were published for discussion across the higher education industry. The *Crossroads* Review generated an enormous amount of deliberation, not only within the industry itself but in the media both in Australia and overseas and in the broader community. The changes which *Crossroads* brought about are possibly the most significant that higher education has undergone in this country. It is for this reason that this work focuses on the consequences for regional Western Australia.

It is argued that the outcome of the introduction of fee paying courses and increased Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) fees which arises from the *Crossroads* Review will, potentially, have a greater impact on regional and rural Western Australian students, because the user does not have an infinite capacity to

pay for what is also a community benefit (Bosetti, 1989:29, 2). This aspect will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

In Western Australia there are special factors that affect the provision of higher education. They are the vastness of the land mass; the small and scattered population outside of the capital city of Perth, the few small regional cities and the difficulty of providing affordable telecommunications to rural and remote areas. These issues are covered in greater detail in chapter five.

Universities are no longer the traditional ‘ivory tower’ institutions set apart from the world but rather they are now actively influencing and increasing the knowledge base of society within a human capital view. In many countries, public higher education institutions now have to contend with new influences in the form of private institutions and market forces. In this environment universities are struggling to meet these challenges by retaining the best of their traditions and independence while themselves becoming market-dominated organisations (de Boer, 2002:54). Universities are being forced to become businesses and corporations with their attendant pressures and problems. Many academics take the view that universities are no longer independent research and teaching institutions free to do the things they do best without interference from national and international organisations (Coady, 2000).

The question is whether the ‘new’ university will serve its community better? Will the current trends in Australian higher education produce a more equitable and inclusive system than that which it replaces? Only the future will tell when the changes have had time to take effect. The prognosis is not altogether positive or confident, however, for many prospective students, affordability becomes an increasing burden and barrier to tertiary study. Those who do take part will find

larger classes as funding declines. The future does not bode well for independent, autonomous universities, or for their staff or students as the administrative and market pressures on them increase. Many universities will struggle to provide high quality research, teaching and learning in an increasingly constrained environment (Quiggin, 2001:1-21)

Recent decades have seen a continuous and subtle reduction in the public resources allocated to higher education in Australia. In the guise of economic rationalism, successive governments have cut back real funding per student for universities and correspondingly shifted the cost to students. One result of this policy is that Australia now has a serious shortage in qualified professional people required to service current employment needs. Some politicians and employers are presently advocating bringing in skilled professional workers from overseas (Colman, 2005).

Driving this analysis is a view that policy-making in Australia, both State and Federal, has too often been based on a framework that is primarily focussed on the needs of the international and the metropolitan rather than rural and remote communities. I am looking at the *Crossroads* Review because it is a crucial policy document in that it articulated major changes to higher education in Australia. Where policies have been made relating to regional Australia they are often based on what governments (mostly city-dwellers) believe country people need or should have rather than any real understanding of what it means to live, work and study in regional Western Australia. Higher education, of course, is of global relevance for Australia, but we must not forget the local. It would be a necessary but not easy task for any government to formulate a higher education policy that responds to all preferences, that is the global, metropolitan and regional needs and values (Taylor, 1997:5 and Bradshaw, 1972).

This thesis argues that for social justice, equity and access to be truly served, the needs of the regional and rural communities must be accurately ascertained and validated rather than further undermined by the dominant forces of economic rationalism and market policy-makers (Prunty, 1985:135-6; Gale, 2003:51). It is not equitable for an inordinately greater proportion of higher education and telecommunications resources to continue to be allocated to the more populous centres in Australia to the detriment of smaller, but still equally as needy, rural and regional communities. Such a metrocentric view of the world denies the social contract that federal and state governments have to all members of our society.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights commits its member parties to ‘*make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity,*’ (Article 26). The current Federal Government in Australia, in the *Crossroads* Review paper: *Varieties of Excellence, Diversity, Specialisation and Regional Management*, also proposes an environment where higher education institutions and regional communities form partnerships to achieve “significant economic, social and cultural benefits [through] ‘learning regions,’ (2002:47-49). Unless all levels of government in Australia are committed to policies that will ensure equitable, accessible higher education and developing increasing numbers of ‘learning regions’ in regional areas, the divide between metropolitan and regional communities seems destined to continue to widen.

Against this background, I have undertaken a critical policy analysis of the *Crossroads* Review. Ball (1994:10) argues that theories of education policy should focus on the workings of the state but not be limited to the control perspective of the state. It is this aspect of higher education that is the basis of this macro sociological analysis (Giddens, 1996:112). It concerns the processes of change and their

consequences in higher education in regional Western Australia up to and including the sweeping revisions advocated in *Crossroads*. I see this as the most important issue relating to higher education in Australia at the present time but I am concerned here more particularly with regional Western Australia. This is a macro level analysis as it deals with the systems of power, history and social structures that underpin higher education policy (Plummer, 1998:238).

It is also argued in this thesis that the provision of affordable, reliable and accessible telecommunications are vital to regional communities in this State, especially if they are to enjoy equal benefits in education and development to those of city dwellers. Telecommunications are essential to the provision of learning communities and distance education in regional areas and are discussed further in chapter five. The research undertaken here shows that in many regional areas of this State, landline systems are unreliable and that mobile telephone and broadband services are unavailable and likely to remain so. This is largely due to the long distances and the small population numbers involved.

### **Research question**

This thesis sets out to investigate two related questions. How is the *Crossroads* Review likely to impact on higher education in regional Western Australia? How can higher education become more equitable and accessible to people in regional Western Australia? In attempting to answer these questions I will undertake a critical policy analysis of:

- The *Crossroads* Review;
- The history and background of higher education;

- The current availability of higher education in regional Western Australia;
- The special needs of regional students, for example the extra living expenses;
- Methods of delivery in regional Western Australia, for example distance education;
- The need for available and reliable telecommunications in rural and remote areas; and
- The development of alternative delivery options such as learning centres.

### **From welfarist to corporate settlement in higher education**

Though the term welfare state did not appear until the 1940s, the movement itself arose during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It began with systems of national social insurance for health and unemployment in Germany and the United Kingdom (Mendelsohn, 1996:268). The theory was founded on the principle that governments have a responsibility for the wellbeing of their citizens that could not be entrusted to individuals, local communities or private corporations (Pierson, 1991; Taylor-Gooby, 1991 in Abercrombie *et al*, 1994:454). In Australia, the Harvester Judgement of 1907 was influential in setting wage standards for male workers but the 1945 White Paper was more comprehensive in that it embodied a political promise of full employment utilising the Keynesian economic system (Stillwell, 1996:10). These and other policies such as the 1983 *Accord* and the 1994 *Working Nation* which also purported to support workers and the unemployed have also had their critics. Stillwell argues that, in essence, rather than provide improved

social conditions for workers, these policies were more favourable to the rich and powerful while doing little for unemployed and low income workers (1996:10). Mendelsohn (1996:276) also describes the Australian welfare state as a ‘disputed terrain.’ As an example, he cites the Menzies government as having instigated a policy of subsidising private schools which, when the Whitlam government came to power, “increased and codified federal assistance to education ... which set in concrete a class-based system of education” (Mendelsohn, 1996:277). McMahon *et al* (1996:314) argue that there is a growing polarity between rich and poor in Australia, due to the conflict between welfarism and market domination and that education or the lack of it is a major factor. Bradley (1999:2) goes further when she states that “governments are retreating from their responsibility for the public good,” and argues that disadvantaged groups, such as the poor, indigenous and rural and remote communities are losing ground in education participation (Bradley, 1999:2).

The welfare systems of the mid-twentieth century in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia were based on the Keynesian “belief that the interests of both workers and capital need to be protected in order to secure the interests of the entire system” (Olssen *et al*, 2004:128). Keynes formulated a system that promoted economic growth while allowing for an extension of the welfare state, a compromise between welfarism and capitalism. This has been increasingly eroded over the past fifty years by the conflict between welfarism and neoliberalism, between responsibility of the state for society and the responsibility of the individual for his or her own advancement. It coincides with the increasing view that the market, through private corporations, should determine economic growth rather than the state (Panitch, 1980:159-187).

The shift from welfarism to neoliberalism and globalisation has occurred in Europe, the United Kingdom, North America, Australia and New Zealand leading, in most cases, to a decrease in social security and the deregulation of labour markets (Olssen *et al*, 2004:11). In that time, advanced capitalist countries have moved from one macroeconomic system to another, one might say one extreme to another, that is from Keynesian welfarism to neoliberal corporate settlement (Olssen *et al*, 2004:71). Aspects of neoliberalism that have had the greatest effects have been “deregulation, privatisation and commodification, placing issues of redistribution and social welfare second to the demands of business and enterprise” (Leonard, undated).

This new corporatist “world view” of higher education has been fuelled by the rise of globalisation, with a corresponding lessening of welfarist or ‘social conscience’ values (Marginson, 1997:36; James, 2000:5-9). Although there is now some discussion about the end of globalisation as an ideology and practice, both it and neoliberalism are still the driving forces behind higher education policy-making in Australia and elsewhere (Saul, 2004). Olssen *et al* (2004:246) argue that “neoliberalism is not only hostile to the welfare state, it is also hostile to social democracy.” Where social democracy encouraged citizenship rights to health, welfare and education, neoliberalism is decreasing or disallowing those rights in favour of competition and market enterprise (MacEwan, 1999:5). Social policy has become progressively more dominated by terms such as accountability, efficiency and economic rationalism, of making a profit instead of providing for society (Welch, 1996:4). Welch argues that neo-liberal ‘efficiency’ policies that increasingly cut public services such as education, health, transport and communications are most strongly felt by already disadvantaged groups often located in regional communities (1996:16). Ball (1998:128) argues that recontextualising education legitimises and

maintains “widespread middle-class concerns about social advantage” and asks, “whose interests are being served?” I suggest that in the long term corporatised education will serve no-one well, not staff, students, communities or society.

Universities, particularly, seem to have become targets in the drive towards a corporate settlement. These changes in Australia reflect, or are reflected by, similar changes to higher education in many other countries over the same period, that is from the end of the Second World War. Those countries briefly considered here in relation to Australia are the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Europe (OECD, 1999). Issues such as equality and social justice are increasingly marginalised in neoliberal policy-making in areas such as health, welfare and education (Ball, 1990:79). Social welfare has been transformed or diminished to fit better in a market-dominated system. In higher education, this has evolved to mean greater control by government bodies over the allocation of public funds, the corporatisation of universities and the changes to tenure of their staff (Ball, 1990:79). Funding has become a major control mechanism through which governments can and do control the operation of public facilities and services through enforced compliance with their policies and ideologies.

James (2003:13) argues that “The role of universities is being undermined by government policies ... and by corporatist administrative practices.” Their “traditional role as mediators of knowledge” and as “social stabilisers” is now deemed by parliamentarians and market forces as being secondary to their role in providing skilled workers (Coady, 2000:216-226; O’Mahony, 2000:3). Higher education is far too important to all individuals and communities to be left to market forces to decide its fate.

Providing accessible higher education to create a skilled workforce would seem to be a rational and logical use of the country's resources and materials and provide for the needs of the whole population (Bosetti, 1989:2). It is not logical or in the country's best interests to force "higher education to meet short-term macro-economic policy goals. According to Patience (2000:37): "making universities pawns in macro-economic policy ... means ... directing public funding according to the narrow perceptions of specific interest groups about short-term employment and labour market requirements." This then runs the risk of over-supply of some graduates skills and under-supply of others. Public spending on technical and higher education over the past few years has declined by almost 13% and Australia now experiences serious shortages in skilled workers, both professional and trade (Bradley, 1999:2; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20/10/2005). It would seem that reducing expenditure on higher education within Australia has been a very short-sighted policy when the obvious benefits of productivity and economic growth through consumer taxation and spending so generated would have largely offset education costs (OECD, 1996:102:3; Wran, 1988:12).

Beginning with the Dawkins review of higher education, Federal Government education policies have adopted an increasingly non-welfarist posture which could be described as 'behavioural public economics' (Kanbur *et al*, 2004:3). Successive governments have moved inexorably towards a 'user pays' view that the individual who directly benefits from it should pay for the privilege. This has been seen in the move away from the Whitlam Government's fee-free university education to the Nelson idea of students and/or their families paying for, if not all, then a major part of their studies. This is being implemented through the medium of 'non-welfarist optimal taxation' methods (Kanbur *et al*, 2004:3) such as the Higher

Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and direct fees charged by the universities themselves. Such an attitude to higher education suggests that higher education is no longer a public good but a positional one, whereby “such education confers social standing in the present [and] ... the promise of future social advantage” (Marginson, 1995:19; Bradley, 1999:3). This was the case prior to the Second World War. However the welfarist policies after 1946 allowed a more socially just system that realised the value to the whole community rather than just to the ‘client’ or student. If the current perspective persists that higher education should be valued as a positional or knowledge good rather than a public one, it can only in the long term become a disadvantage to the whole fabric of Australian society (Marginson, 1997; Bradley, 1999:8). We are living in an age where knowledge and its ownership are becoming increasingly important and valuable to universities, governments and large corporations in an increasingly market-dominated setting (Marginson, 1995:21). It must not be forgotten, however, that knowledge is equally as important to the future of all Australians and their ready access to it must not be denied or undermined. Globalisation has changed the way we view knowledge so that we now see it more as a marketable commodity and less as a right and entitlement of all people. In so positioning knowledge it then becomes less available to society as a whole for the advantage of all.

### **Globalisation and the knowledge economy**

It is now widely argued that, unlike the industrial age where the market was based on production, this post-modern world is becoming more globalised and more centralised on a knowledge-based economy (Burton-Jones, 1999:199 and Van Damme, 2001:1-13). Modern technology and communications have made the world smaller and made us all more aware of other countries, their politics and cultures,

their triumphs and their conflicts. This is particularly so through the immediacy of world news programmes on television and through the Internet. In this new 'knowledge society' it has become imperative for the creation and dissemination of information to be made available to all nations and cultures, to augment their economic and social progress (Teichler, 2000:3). Every individual in Australia is connected to and affected by the events and influences of the post-modern world. Martin Heidegger said, "...there was never a time when you were free from interacting with this world and its web of relationships and influences..." (Wilson, 1997:1). If they are to have a fair chance in a knowledge-based society, regional communities need significantly improved access to modern communications and technology and to higher education than is currently available to them. We are all inter-connected, none of us lives in isolation; 'No man is an island, entire of itself,' is now even more true than when written by John Donne in 1623. We are all to a greater or lesser degree part of the new globalised knowledge society whether we like it or not and we all need the skills with which to participate.

The world is becoming increasingly subjected to social, political and financial threats and upheavals, probably more so than at any other time in recorded history. Power is progressively being centred on the wealthier nation states and on its larger metropolitan and financial capitals and corporations. National boundaries are becoming blurred by modern information and financial systems (Cavanagh *et al*, 2000:10) as well as by environmental changes. These and many other issues associated with the enormous changes occurring in and to the world's nation states also impact on Australian society and its institutions.

Globally and locally, for much of the past forty years, higher education has been in a state of uncertainty. In Australia, successive federal governments have

endeavoured to reshape education according to the policies and principles of economic rationalism. This approach is consistent with the internationalisation of education, the spread of neoliberalism globally and the growing influence of organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that has an ever-increasing power over member nation states, regions and their institutions.

Globalisation has made higher education crucial for all, and its importance was recognised by the World Conference on Higher Education in 1998. As stated in the preamble to the conference proceedings,

there is an unprecedented demand for and a great diversification in higher education, as well as an increased awareness of its vital importance for sociocultural and economic development, and for building the future, for which the younger generations will need to be equipped with new skills, knowledge and ideals, (World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), 1998:1).

This is equally true for mature age students, as they also need to keep up with modern knowledge and technologies, particularly in the changes to the world of work.

In this broader context, I am especially interested in access to and equity in higher education in regional communities in Australia and the effects this might be expected to have on the future ability of these communities to increase their social, political and economic capital and their place in the new world. It is well documented both in Australia and overseas, that the better educated a community is,

the more likely its members are to enjoy a higher standard of living and be more independent and active citizens (WCHE. 1998:1) Education at all levels, including continuing lifelong learning in adulthood is a valuable instrument in raising a community's skills, experience and self-reliance. This aspect will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter five, as well as the benefits that have accrued to the communities studied.

Higher education institutions currently have seen many changes to their funding matrix with a lower proportion of public expenditure, greater private funding and the push towards corporatisation. This has resulted in university administration having to manage funds, research programmes, courses, student numbers and facilities in a valiant attempt to provide equity for staff, students and their communities in a manner that is new to university life. This has often caused anxiety to academia, administrations and the student bodies. Many fear that excessively exuberant implementation of neoliberal ideals, such as the 'user pays,' may see a return to a more elitist system where only those who can afford a university education will be able to access it. This would represent a clear divergence from Section 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights, the World Conference on Higher Education (1998). It is also a departure from the various promises on access and equity by recent federal governments, such as that proposed in the 'clever country' paper of the Labor government at the time (Linke, 1990).

### **Changing world – changing student bodies**

In the past decade in Australia, as in most OECD countries, the number of students in higher education has risen. The number of graduates in Australia increased by ten percent from 1991 to 2001 with 29 per cent of the 25-64 age group achieving degree qualifications (OECD, 2003:46). However, while public

expenditure per student in the past has been above the OECD average, it is now falling. Australia's expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage of GDP was 1.7% in 1995; in 2000 it had dropped slightly to 1.6% (OECD, 2003:206). Contrary to the situation in most OECD countries over the same period, public funding for tertiary institutions in Australia has declined from 64.6% to 51%, while private funding has increased from 35.4% to 49% in real terms (OECD, 2003:215-218). In 1999, 18% of Australians were educated to tertiary level, compared with 19% in Canada, 17% in the United Kingdom and 27% in the United States (OECD mean level 14%), (ABS, 2002:119). The regions with the highest number of higher education students are, and have always been, in inner city areas, close to resident campuses – true across all courses of study, internal and external, full time and part-time, for young people and mature age students (ABS:1996:34-35). In 2002, there were approximately 695,000 higher education students in Australia (ABS, 2002: 86-87).

Until recently, the main body of university students has been school leavers studying for their first and only degrees before entering the workforce. Over the past two or three decades, however, the average age of higher education participants has been increasing as greater numbers of mature age students enter undergraduate, or return to postgraduate study. This may be for personal development, or to keep pace with technological changes in their lifestyles and careers (Rossman, 2002). It is now becoming more common for individuals to have at least two, and sometimes more, different careers throughout their working lives, either from personal choice or as some of the more traditional professions and occupations alter drastically, become redundant or disappear altogether. This is driving the need for lifelong learning and further study.

In 1998, a Federal Government Review Committee on Higher Education Financing and Policy reported that “higher education can play a critical role by equipping Australians with the skills and knowledge to meet the social and economic challenges of the twenty-first century,” (DETYA, 1998:43). Higher education is again under review by the current Federal Government and the changes proposed seem likely to have across-the-board effects on tertiary institutions and their management over the next few years. It is changing to meet the challenges of the social, political and economic transformations occurring in and to its society and internationally, as Australia comes to terms with new global policies and practices governing all facets of modern life. It is not only the younger people in our society who need to acquire new skills and knowledge in this post-modern world. Lifelong learning has become a necessity for most members of our society as careers and lifestyles change and skills which might have been learned in higher or further education even as little as a decade ago have perhaps become obsolete. The possible impact of such changes on regional education and regional communities is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

### **Turning point or *Crossroads***

The Howard Government’s proposed modifications to Australia’s higher education system through the medium of *Crossroads* will largely determine not only how many people will attain higher education qualifications but also from which regions and whether rural and remote students will have greater, or lesser, access to such education than they do at present.

The main theme of the *Crossroads* series of papers has to do with neoliberal values, that is a market-driven attitude to higher education rather than a social contract ideal. While the rhetoric ostensibly promotes equity and access for all it is

clearly driving towards a ‘user pays’ system of funding higher education in the future. This will have a direct effect on all students and their families but I contend there will be a much greater impact on regional students, and in due course, on their families and communities, in regional Western Australia. The effects will be felt not only in the relative inability of regional students to pay higher fees, but in difficulties maintaining the existing regional institutions and in the provision of further campuses or learning centres.

Higher fees will deter many students from undertaking further studies, particularly if they have to move closer to a distant centre of learning for courses that are not available through external studies. The increased costs to students and their families will impact on all students but will have a greater effect on rural and regional students. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services stated that “Access to lifelong education and training opportunities is second only to access to information and communication technologies in shaping the future of regional Australians” (2000:255).

Rossman (2002:1) has argued that the coming changes necessitated by altered political and social attitudes to higher education must be flexible and equitable enough to allow access to all Australians, whether geographically advantaged or disadvantaged. This is so whether the user or the public pays, and whatever other funding can be made available in the form of corporate sponsorship for research. It will be a difficult though eminently worthwhile task for current and future governments to provide a sufficiently practicable higher education funding matrix from which all citizens can benefit. This will enable us, our communities and our society as a whole to compete effectively in the modern world and to grow with it

without losing our own unique culture and identity. These changes are discussed in more detail in chapter three on the *Crossroads* Review.

### **Regional Australians and access to higher education**

Access to higher education in regional areas of Australia has increased over the past few years, particularly in medium-sized urban and rural areas with a population greater than 20,000, (for example, Albany, Bunbury and Broome in Western Australia). As the population of other regional areas increases, the problem becomes how to provide them with access to higher education. It is suggested later in this thesis that learning regions and learning communities are a possible alternative that might help to alleviate this problem.

This is especially important to regional areas of Australia with low population numbers which have, to date, been under-funded and under-resourced in the area of higher education and have shown lower participation and completion rates for study than have metropolitan areas (ABS:1996:34-35). This is equally the case for attendance and achievement levels at upper secondary school levels, at TAFE colleges and at universities. If regional communities are to be able to keep pace with the march of globalisation and the new knowledge economies then, not only are more accessible tertiary institutions needed in more regional centres, but they need to be a strong force in their embedded communities. According to Garclik (2000:15), “Stronger engagement between universities and the regions they are located in has the potential to generate national, regional and institutional returns across a wide spectrum of social objectives,”. This would ensure not only an increase in the intellectual capital of such regions, but also a flow-on in terms of social and economic benefits, (ABS, 2002:86-87). Australia is often said to be an urban society with two thirds of all Australians living in the major urban centres, particularly

capital cities. A large proportion of those people who live in smaller regional centres do not currently have access to higher education institutions or branches other than via distance or online communications systems. The socio-economic status of regional Australians has traditionally tended to be lower than metropolitan equivalents and not all rural citizens are able, either because of financial circumstances or lack of telecommunications services, to access education systems online. Australians with higher qualifications have a 15% higher chance of being in paid work, so lower regional participation in further education has contributed to lower numbers of qualified individuals in rural areas and often, correspondingly, higher rates of unemployment (ABS, 2002:119).

### **Why learning communities?**

In this work, a learning community is defined as a 'local' group of interested persons with common goals of learning, of dialogue and debate on local as well as regional and national issues. It also envisages a sharing of knowledge, information, teaching and learning resources for the empowerment and benefit of its surrounding population (Ariadne, 2002:33)

Given the sparse nature of Australia's regional populations and the high student unit cost of establishing branch campuses of major universities, it would be improbable to expect that resident or local access to higher education will ever become the norm for many country people. One possible alternative is for qualified facilitators, possibly from the major universities, to set up and supervise learning communities in the smaller regional centres of population. Learning communities have some of the advantages of resident campuses in that members of the group can give support to each other as they come together to examine and debate issues in their learning programmes. On-campus students who have access to tutorials and on-

campus student associations and discussion groups have long enjoyed such opportunities. Such facilitated groups would provide the person-to-person advantages that external study by correspondence and on line virtual learning, though valuable tools in education, do not usually present. Until recently, internal students in resident campuses have had an advantage over external students in being able to attend tutorials and other less formalised discussion groups. However, as a result of the decreasing funding for higher education, many tutorials are being cut and class sizes are increasing. This will serve to limit the effectiveness of face-to-face contact between students and academic staff. New technologies such as email and on-line discussion groups have become more commonplace for internal as well as external students and, while they are less personal and immediate, they do at least provide some manner of debate and allow for feedback to students from their lecturers and tutors.

The increasing importance of knowledge in modern economies requires continuous learning for all individuals across societies to allow them to adapt to their changing environment (Burton Jones, 1999:199). Increased levels of educational attainment also lead to stronger, more positive, more economically viable societies which are more confident and better able to take responsibility for their own destiny (ABS, 2002:86-87). Even in quite small centres, a community learning facility which shares information and opinions can lead not only to a greater awareness of its own communities, but also knowledge and understanding of the wider world and other opportunities available to it, thus increasing personal as well as community development. Laszlo argues (2000:2) that “[t]he objective [in building such] learning communities would be to provide a learning opportunity to individuals in .... social groups who do not [presently] have ready access to [higher] education” other than

through online and distance methods of delivery. Whilst such communities would be largely self-organised and enabling, formal higher education facilitation or services would need to be provided or at least made possible by institutions already established in major urban areas, thus reducing much of the administrative and capital asset costs associated with establishing large campuses.

Modern theories of education such as lifelong learning or learning for life and the increasing importance of technology and communications have encouraged, and in some cases necessitated, more mature adults to return to further education and training (Candy *et al*, 1994:16). Government policy changes over the past two decades have led to some improvements in equitable access to higher education. This has been facilitated partly by branch campuses of major universities but also technologies such as the telecentres utilising the Internet, satellite communications, online teaching and learning and the option of studying part-time and/or externally. Learning communities in the regions would allow participants to remain in their home or local environments, to share directly in the knowledge and culture gained in their own communities without the disruption to work and family lives, or the added costs of relocating to the major population centres and larger campuses.

### **Delivering higher education in regional Australia**

How we put the new education policies into practice, however, and how we build those learning communities of the future are at least as important as the knowledge we impart in them. The economic advantages of building virtual teaching facilities using online and distance education are enticing for governments and education institutions. They have the power to reach into every home and classroom where reliable connections are available, but they should be recognised and used for what they are: a new tool in an old profession. It would be too easy to forget that

there are enormous social and economic advantages resulting from the establishment of physical campuses or learning centres in regional communities, not least the communities' own ability to take part in and to extend the range and quality of education available to them. Higher education would then be accessible to many more of the nation's citizens rather than just those who are geographically privileged to live within easy reach of the resident campuses established in major centres (Rossman, 2002).

Jonassen (2002) reports that a "social revolution in learning" should be encouraged [and has] proposed the need for "a renaissance in thinking where learning is willingly and wilfully embedded in every activity of our culture," (Rossman, 2002). In building learning communities we must first teach children how to learn, as they will need to continue to learn throughout their lives in order to cope with their ever-changing worlds and the probability of several career changes during their working lives. Teaching children how to learn is less traditional in Western countries but an autodidactic system can be achieved which would give everyone who wants to learn the opportunity to do so (Hayes, 2000:1-7). Hayes also writes that, "A thirst for knowledge is, in part, a product of a radicalised awareness of one's being in the world. Expanded awareness [is] an integral component of self-direction and is an antidote to both indoctrination and intellectual and economic poverty." In most Bedouin communities for example, children are taught how to learn when they are ready and willing to do so. They learn what they need to know as Bedouin and then learn what they need to know to live in the wider world (Reid, 2000:7). Such learning communities as these can then participate and survive in the world while still also keeping their own culture and identity. As will be discussed chapter five, learning communities can be very successful, provided there is an awareness of the

disadvantages and difficulties, and procedures are developed to work through them. However, learning to learn, and especially learning independently, is an important prerequisite.

In a globalised world, it is too easy for cultures and identities to be subjugated. Every Australian, from each of the different ethnic, social, major and minor cultural groups which make up our nation, needs to know his or her own story as well as their collective Australian identity. Access to higher education then should, hopefully, give them the knowledge and the skills to know themselves and their history, to take an active role in their own community and in the world, to accept and grow with changing environments with confidence and understanding. Education can address inequality and disadvantage as well as promote tolerance and understanding (OECD Combat Poverty submission, 2004:1-4).

Satellite communications have made the world seem a much smaller place and, given the available finances and reliable equipment, every individual can have access to the world's libraries, newspapers and other information resources, as well as to distance education. However these resources, though excellent in themselves, do not provide as effectively for such an inclusive social interaction and sharing of knowledge and opinions as attendance at a physical campus or facilitated learning community. These cost effective solutions may not always deliver what the community needs in practical educational terms.

Establishing and operating physical campuses, though more expensive, would allow participants to learn face-to-face from their lecturers, tutors and from each other and to co-exist in an atmosphere which is not only conducive to learning but to active co-operation and citizenship. An advantage is the transmission of knowledge, which in Gibbons' (2001:2) view, "seeps through from science

[academia] to society and from society to science” (see also Wolfe, 2000:3). Such small regional campuses and telecentres as have been established so far have shown greater community participation in learning (Fuchs, 1998:3; Short, 1998:1-19). They have provided opportunities for people to come together to study, to debate and gain access to and share information and knowledge that was not perhaps previously available to them.

Studies to date show that a university established in a rural area provides not only increased intellectual and knowledge capital but, by default, also increases the community’s social capital and active citizenship (Gray, 2001:291; Bradley, 1999:5). The community’s social cohesion, its economic worth and its ability to compete in an increasingly competitive and technological world environment are also enhanced.

### **Research methodology**

The methodology adopted in this dissertation is a critical policy analysis of higher education policies in Australia, and Western Australia in particular. In this task, I draw on a range of literature resources including printed and on-line documentation; government publications, statutes and policy statements; political party and news media publications; as well as books, journals and other documentation from public institutions and private corporations. In addition, I utilise informal conversation with colleagues in the South West and Great Southern Regions of Western Australia who, like myself, are or have been involved in workplace training and in external university studies.

Prunty (1985:133-140) emphasises four points essential to critical policy analysis. They are that it:

1. must be mindful of the “workings of both [higher] education and society”;
2. must be guided by moral and ethical principles;
3. identifies systems of power and control and how they are legitimised and maintained; and
4. identifies the values of the policy-makers and policy-users and determines whose values are confirmed and/or denied.

That is to say, a critical policy analysis is more than simply a matter of identifying the gap between the rhetoric and reality of official policy. It must discover whether the policy can be transferred from theory into action and whose interests are served (Gale *et al*, 2003:3). It must also recognise and understand the “conflicts between the national, local and institutional [agenda] and the changing relationships between them” (Ball, 1998:127). As Foucault argues:

critique is a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest. Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as we believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practising criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult (cited in Olssen *et al*, 2004:40).

Critical policy analysis is a method used by policy-makers and stakeholders alike for determining the soundness or otherwise of any policy which is either

proposed or is already in existence. This can be a difficult task given that policy can mean different things to different people. It can also depend on who is asking the questions in critical policy analysis or whose interests are served by it (Marshall, 2003:345). To an organisation such as a government or large corporate body, policy is a word used to define an over-arching code of practice or set of rules by which those affected are expected to conduct themselves. To other, perhaps less formalised, groups, communities or individuals, policy can simply mean a set of guiding principles rather than strict regulations. Kogan describes policy as a “statement of prescriptive intent” or the “authoritative allocation of values (1975:55 in Vidovich, 2001:2). Ball (1994:12) expressed the view that policy is both text and action, words and deeds, that it is what is enacted as well as what is intended.

Critical policy analysis endeavours to draw attention to the limitations of policy and put forward suggestions for amelioration. However, much of the analysis that has been done in education in recent years has, as its terms of reference, institutionalisation of political goals and power bases rather than consideration of individuals or minority groups (Olssen *et al*, 2004:2; Prunty, 1985:134). Critical policy analysis plays a role in interpreting how “official discourse helps to construct, reconstruct and conceal” (Olssen *et al*, 2004:2).

Prunty makes four key points about critical policy analysis. I shall now consider them in turn. First, it may be assumed that the critical policy analyst already has an understanding of how her/his society works but it is imperative that s/he also understands the workings of the minority group for whom the study is being carried out, in this case regional Western Australia. In critically analysing the *Crossroads* higher education policy, it is equally important to understand the government position and its workings. Kenway, (1990 cited in Taylor *et al*, 1997:39) asks the

question “why is higher education policy being changed, for whose benefit and why now?” Yeatman (1990 cited in Taylor, 2002) asks “what are the historical, social, political and economic texts on which the policy stands?” What effects are these likely to have on society now and in the future and will underprivileged or marginalised groups such as regional Western Australians be further disadvantaged? In answering these questions the analyst should be able to determine what conflicts exist between the local and the national. This leads to Prunty’s second point - whether the ethics and morals of the policy being reviewed are consistent with or at variance to those of the society which will be most affected by them.

Second, Prunty makes the point that critical policy analysis must be guided by the moral and ethical traditions within the society it sets out to examine (1985:133-140). It is necessary here to identify and understand how the policy sits within society’s moral and ethical framework, given that any government higher education policy is political and has a different agenda from that of end users. The analysis must then determine whether a conflict exists between the moral and ethical stances of writers and users. It is often easier to determine whether a policy is ethical, as it is simply a question of deciding if the policy is good or bad, why and for whom. A moral stance is not so easy to determine, in that different groups within society may consider their moral principles differ. For example, a neoliberal government will base its moral principles on a market agenda while the regional community of Western Australia will consider the principles of social justice in higher education to be relevant. Gordon, Lewis and Young (1977 cited in Prunty 1985:133) recommend that the critical “policy analyst’s role should include advocacy, providing information for policy, monitoring and evaluation of policy, and

analysis of policy content.” It must be guided primarily by the principles of social justice and ethical and moral values of the community for whom it is an advocate.

Third, critical policy analysis relates to the authoritative allocation of values and draws our attention to the centrality of power and control in the concept of policy, and requires us to consider not only whose values are represented in the policy, but also how these values have become institutionalised (1985: 136). This kind of critical policy analysis recognises the power and control exerted by texts such as *Crossroads* and the sense of powerlessness felt in many areas of regional Western Australia. In critically analysing the policies that concern regional populations in Western Australia, it must be noted most of these communities have a strong belief that their values and needs are rarely, if ever, considered by the spheres of power. This view is held regardless of whether the decisions made are at State or Federal levels and is believed to be due mainly to their regional ‘small voice’ in matters that affect them directly. This pessimistic view of policy does not serve country people well as they then often fail to act to challenge overarching national, or city-based, assumptions but rather allow them, by default, to persist. The limitations imposed by this view have become so much a part of regional experience that it is accepted as ‘the norm’ (Olssen *et al*, 2004:39). Part of the role of the critical policy analyst is to explain how individuals, institutions and communities operate in contexts that are both enabling and constraining.

An analyst must be able to examine a policy context and gauge which clauses or conditions maintain the “subtleties of oppression” manifested by organisations of power such as governments and large corporations, as an advocate for those groups not included in the design and development of those policies which affect them (Prunty, 1985:134; Olssen *et al*, 2004:60). It will then be possible for the analyst to

propose ways of minimising any disadvantageous effects or of negotiating compromises for the relevant clauses and conditions. The analyst may then be able to achieve positive outcomes for the groups for whom s/he is conducting the policy analysis.

Fourth, critical analysis is interested in whose values and interests are being served by the policy under review. It investigates policy issues from the point of view of the individuals or groups for whom it is being carried out. It is a technique for understanding and interpreting the context of a policy in terms of those values, and can be used by and for both its writers and the clients over whom it has authority. Ham and Hill (1984:11 in Vidovich, 2001:2) state that “policy analysis aims to interpret the causes and consequences of government action, in particular the processes of policy formation.” It is particularly useful when used by minority groups who were not included in the design and implementation phases, for example regional students and communities affected by Federal governments higher education policy, as in this study.

Critical policy analysis acknowledges that all research, whether in the physical or social sciences, is never value-neutral (Thomson & Wellard, 1999:1; Scheurich, 1994:297). It is conditioned by the beliefs and values of its analysts and therefore open to their biases, especially if it is used merely as a tool to verify or to legitimate the context in which it was written. In the case of higher education in Australia, a distinctly metrocentric framework underpins most federal and state policies and processes. According to Prunty (1985:136) this “centrality of power and control in the concept of policy” serves to institutionalise dominant political values such as economic rationalism, rather than considering the interests of minority groups, whether in higher education, health or welfare (Bradley, 1999:5).

For policy analysis to be effective researchers need to be aware of their own political and cultural attitudes, values and needs as well as those of the minority group for whom their study is being conducted. It is also imperative for the analyst to have a good knowledge of the policy, its real and its professed aims and objectives in order to facilitate an accurate analysis. Critical policy analysis must be broad enough to determine whose values underpin the policy, what it purports to do and whether what it will do is different from its stated aims (Olssen, 2004:60; Bradley, 1999:8). Any policy that affects how people are managed should ideally also be examined for its ethics, equity and social justice (Prunty, 1985:133). A policy analysis that fails to do this is likely to fail to focus on the real as well as perceived outcomes, on what effects it will have on those communities and individuals who are served or not served by its context.

### **Significance of the research**

The significance of this study is that it seeks to provide a better understanding of what *Crossroads* means to regional students and communities in Western Australia now and in the future. It highlights some of the special difficulties faced by regional and rural students and communities and suggests the establishment of learning communities as a means of providing higher education to regional Western Australia. It is hoped that it will help inform future policy discussions between regional communities and policy-makers and for further research.

Any policies which affect society deserve to be, and in fact in a truly democratic society must be, critically analysed to ascertain whether they address the actual and perceived needs of all those affected and whether society's needs are fulfilled. It is particularly necessary that such policies be analysed on behalf of under-privileged and minority groups. In this study, it is the rural and regional

communities of Western Australia who are deemed to be a minority group whose needs are often overlooked in favour of majority views or political vested interests. For politicians to be careless about ensuring a reliable and accessible higher education for regional students simply because there are not enough of them to make a difference vote-wise is as a minimum both cynical and shortsighted.

As Foucault observed, policy is a politically, socially and historically contextualised discourse designed to institutionalise systems of power (Olssen *et al*, 2004:66). If one accepts this view, then analysing neoliberal education policy is a complex task of understanding the social and other structures that underpin it (Olssen *et al*, 2004:2-3). This research is also significant in that it attempts to decode the discourse of *Crossroads* Review and so provide an understanding of its implications from the perspective of regional Western Australia.

This research has been conducted and written by a person with experience as a higher education student living in rural Western Australia with experience as a lecturer at regional adult education organisations including a regional technical and further education college. While not being value-neutral for this reason, it has provided a practical basis from which to carry out this critical policy analysis of *Crossroads*. The thesis identifies and makes visible a social dilemma that may otherwise have remained invisible to public notice at national and state levels (Scheurich, 1994:300).

It is hoped that this study will bring the significance of the needs of rural and regional communities to the attention of politicians and higher education policy makers in both State and Federal governments. It is also hoped that this policy critique will raise awareness in regional communities and empower them to take a more activist role in pursuing a more fair and just provision of higher education. It is

only through the informed actions of all stakeholders that such a centralised power base as currently exists can be equalised in favour of all Australians. It is vital for politicians and city-dwellers alike to realise that they need country people for the provision of agriculture and other industries as much as country people rely on them for the provision of services and facilities.

### **The limitations of this study**

This study is a critique of official higher education policies in Australia and Western Australia at a macro level. It aims to understand the contested and political nature of policies with particular regard to *Crossroads*. There are five universities in the Western Australia. Most have several campuses in the State, some of which are in regional areas, some have combined with other universities or with the Technical and Further Education system (*Crossroads*, Table d1, 2002:72). Some more detailed information is given in the Appendix about five of the regional campuses in Western Australia, as an illustration of what is currently available to students and their communities. A series of detailed studies of higher education in Western Australia would be valuable for future planning and policy analysis but is not the aim of this writer at this time. A micro study of educational attainment and its effects on economic situations of individuals and communities in regional Western Australia would also be valuable but is outside the scope of this work. Such a study may be undertaken in the future, as the two together would give an overall picture of how the institutional and individual aspects interact in higher education in rural and regional areas of WA (Plummer, 1998:240).

Another limitation of this study is that it has focused on the higher education needs of regional Western Australians rather than the State or the nation as a whole. It was considered that, while there is some published data on levels of education

achievement and employment of regional populations, particularly young people, it is important to study some of the reasons for and results of this in terms of the higher education currently available to them and the possible consequences of *Crossroads* (ABS, 2001 census). I have not undertaken qualitative or quantitative research of the impact of higher education on the lives of people in regional Western Australia. This thesis may provide a prelude to a more detailed research.

The analysis of higher education provision and its implications in this State have been limited to *Crossroads* and other published data. It was not the intention of this work to analyse the several hundred varied and valuable responses to *Crossroads*.

### **Structure of thesis**

This thesis contains six chapters, an appendix, a glossary and a bibliography. In this first chapter I have introduced the research focus, provided a contextual background and discussed the methodology of a critical policy analysis. I discuss some of the theories and beliefs that affect higher education in Australia, such as globalisation, welfarism and corporate settlement. I have identified key features of critical policy analysis that I will draw upon to consider the place of higher education in regional Western Australia, especially in regional areas.

Chapter two provides an overview of the history of higher education in Australia from colonial times to *Crossroads* in 2002-2003. There have been many influences on higher education in Australia in its short history but the consequences of *Crossroads* are likely to have the most far-reaching effects for what is now termed an industry and for society as a whole.

Chapter three examines in detail the *Crossroads* document. This is due to the importance of the Review to current and future higher education in Australia and the major changes it is likely to engender. This chapter examines those issues most likely to have the greatest impact on regional higher education, such as social justice, financing and regional engagement. It also studies some of the Review's proposals and a number of the responses generated by it. This critical policy analysis of *Crossroads* will seek to determine whether the proposed market reforms in higher education will provide a more equitable delivery of higher education to regional Western Australians. It is further argued in chapter three, that the section of the *Crossroads* Review devoted to regional Australia does not show sufficient understanding of the complexity of the issue, nor propose any real solutions for widening access and improving equity.

Chapter four discusses regional higher education in Western Australia as it is, as it has been and what is likely to occur in the foreseeable future. One of the issues dealt with in *Crossroads* has been an emphasis on regional higher education. This chapter will discuss whether the proposed changes will impact positively or negatively on regional Western Australia. The five major universities in Western Australia are briefly discussed, four of which are publicly funded and one private. Two of the public institutions are universities in the traditional sense and two were reclassified as universities at the end of the Binary System in Australia. This chapter explores the relationship of the regional campuses to their embedded communities. As noted, details are included in the Appendix along with descriptions of some regional campuses and their facilities. Also discussed are some of the special problems which regional campuses and their students face in Western Australia.

Chapter five suggests some alternative methods for providing higher education in smaller regional centres where a physical campus may not be practicable due to the small and widespread population and to economic pressures. The development of learning regions and communities have been studied in some depth, their advantages, disadvantages and more particularly their capacity for building sustainable regional and rural communities, which will allow them to benefit from higher education and to compete in an increasingly globalised, corporate world environment. This chapter also briefly considers access to online, distance, virtual and international higher education provision and the strengths and weaknesses of each method of delivery from the point of view of the students and their communities. It concludes that, in many regional areas of Western Australia, the establishment of physical campuses will remain unachievable because of their small population numbers and the cost of establishing and maintaining them. Finally, this chapter also summarises the condition of higher education in the State and highlights the urgency of widening its provision into regional areas whose population does not yet have access. The OECD Reports (1999; 2001) have described the importance of regions in the future development and progress of the knowledge economy and globalisation. This adds urgency to the need to address the imbalance in higher education and other services to regional Western Australia. There are likely to be dire consequences for Western Australia, its population and its progress if governments at all levels in Australia fail to heed such warnings and do not provide accessible, equitable higher education for all.

Chapter six summarises the research and draws conclusions concerning higher education provision in regional Western Australia. In light of the internationalisation of education and the mounting importance of the regions to

Australia's economic and social development, it is stressed that increasing and strengthening the delivery of higher education to regional communities is an urgent imperative. It is argued that government intervention is required in the form of policy changes and further funding if this is to be achieved in the short term. It is acknowledged that the provision of physical campuses in many regional areas of Western Australia present complex economic issues for government, university and corporate funding bodies due to the smallness of the population and the distances between communities. It is argued that there are fundamental social, economic and political benefits in providing higher education to rural and remote communities that then have a ripple effect on Australian society as a whole. That this is central to the country's progress is well documented but not all of these benefits are, as we have seen, either easily quantifiable or measurable (Gibbs, 2005:1; Jischke, undated, pp. 76).

Furthermore, it is argued that the provision and maintenance of modern telecommunications in non-metropolitan areas of this State are unequal to those provided in the Perth Metropolitan Area and in other states with larger populations, for example Victoria and New South Wales. This is an issue that affects not only the ability of remote communities to access online methods of education but also their future social and economic well-being in the global marketplace.

It is argued that higher education in regional Western Australia requires urgent action by all levels of government, particularly the Federal Government, as it is the major controlling body involved in both policies and practices relating to higher education.

## **Chapter two – higher education in Australia – historical and political influences**

### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with the history of higher education in Australia and is included as a background to the critical policy analysis of *Crossroads* and the issues affecting regional Western Australia. It is an account of changing government policies and social attitudes over the short history of what is now viewed by governments and corporations as the ‘industry’ of higher education. Australian society’s approach to higher education, originally shaped by the social order of colonial times, has moved through periods of expansion and contraction, through liberal values to those of the market place. Formal higher education in Australia has had a short but fascinating history. It continues to be a policy area which elicits strong emotions — particularly now.

Education in Australia was, in the past, mainly the responsibility of the various State Governments, each with its own systems and priorities. However, with the advent of national accreditation systems and the greater mobility of our population, the States are now moving towards a more unified approach to education at all levels. While primary, secondary and TAFE (Technical and Further Education) education still remain largely in the hands of the State Governments (Hancock, 1989:73), the Commonwealth Government of Australia has assumed a dominant role in both funding and setting policies in higher education.

The nation, and its higher education systems, have grown from a series of separate British colonies in the nineteenth century, through Federation on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1901, to what is now an increasingly nationalised education system. As

the nation has continued to grow and adapt, higher education has also evolved, reflecting altered political points of view and the changing social contexts.

In these first few years of the twenty-first century, it would seem that higher education is continuing to change rapidly. It is moving away from the previously widely held welfarist view that everyone who could achieve the entry requirements should have the opportunity to attend university without too heavy a financial burden (Macklin, radio interview 20/12/04). There is now a contrary view held by many politicians and community groups such as industry and commerce that those 'lucky enough' to attend university, should bear all or most of the cost. Their belief seems to be that the student is the main beneficiary and the 'user' should therefore pay for what s/he is about to receive. This denies the notion of public good that the whole community benefits, not just the graduate (Bradley, 1999:3). In other words, you cannot have an education unless you can afford it, "which further entrenches privilege in society" (Welch, 1996:16). Potential students and their families are likely to think deeply about their ability to repay increased student loans during their working lives and in many cases, may decide, in spite of their academic ability to do so, not to undertake university study and incur the debt implied. Of the countries studied, Australia is one of the few that charges interest on student loans (Usher, 2005:8). This increases the debt over time for those students who do not gain employment readily or who need to take work breaks for pregnancy or other reasons. It also may become a contributing factor to lifestyle choices where the need to repay student loans clash with the ability to buy homes, raise families and service mortgages.

Most people would agree that university students, as the prime beneficiary of their study, should indeed at least bear some of the cost. Views about what that

proportion of the cost should be varies greatly and it would be difficult to arrive at a compromise that would be acceptable to all - students, politicians, taxpayers and other interested parties. Students and their families would argue that it is unreasonable for them to be expected bear the full or major part of the expense of a university education when society also benefits. If the cost becomes too high for the students and their families to bear, it would restrict the numbers of students who can afford to enter university. It would also ignore the beneficial ripple effect that acquired learning has across communities and across society itself.

Even in colonial times in Australia, it was believed that education was a valuable tool for conditioning individuals into becoming good citizens to take an active role in their communities; yet Australian society has had, and largely still has a “suspicion of intellectual achievement” (Milne, 2001:4). This was still noticeable during the Hawke Government era (Milne, 2001:3). This suspicion has tended to constrain many of the policies that have attempted to alleviate this bias such as those increasing equity and access to minority groups, and to those who are financially disadvantaged. It is an attitude that has been allied to the myth of the ‘tall poppy syndrome,’ and attributed to Australia’s origins as colonies of convicts and free settlers. The so-called ‘elite,’ or free settlers, were seen to have ‘more than they deserved’ and were tall poppies who needed cutting down to size. It was a way of associating with or dissociating from individuals or groups from different strata of colonial society (Turner, 1987).

In Australia, as in all countries, there has always been a connection between education and politics (Broadfoot, 1981:1). Social and political changes have affected policies on education from kindergarten to graduation and beyond, at local, State and Federal levels of funding and decision-making (Tomlinson, 1982:67;

Harman, 1982:1). Successive governments, each with their different ideological priorities, have brought into being new policies regarding the establishment, financing, structure and governance of education at all levels. All of these have impacted on regional as well as metropolitan populations. In recent years, neoliberal policies have tended to be centred on the major urban areas even more than before and thus are likely to impact even more on regional areas as decisions regarding funding for higher education sites are debated.

During the Second World War, the Commonwealth took over the collection of income tax. This reduced the States' ability to adequately fund higher education. Federal governments have since then increasingly funded and controlled higher education, for the most part through a system of grants, to a point where the States now have little real input into, or control over it. This trend began in 1943 as a result of the Walker Committee's Report on the Commonwealth and Education (Laming, 2001:3). Higher education was not assigned in Section 51 of Australia's Constitution. Until the Second World War, State funds, student fees and private endowments largely funded universities (Crittenden, 1989:73). However, State funding ceased in the 1970s when the Commonwealth took over.

Governments have used the medium of committees of inquiry and their ensuing reports to determine policies, or to make autocratic decisions about all sectors of education in Australia, particularly since the end of the Second World War (Davies, 1989:2-9; Smart, 1986:201). While committees of inquiry are set up in the main to provide governments with accurate information on specific social issues in each case, there are other influences on their outcomes. The committee members and politicians in power at the time each come to their task with their own sets of values, attitudes and acquired knowledge that will inevitably affect the conclusions of their

inquiry. The timing of Federal and State elections has also affected the outcomes of policy shifts. More than one committee of inquiry has had its report shelved due to a new government coming to power with different priorities and expectations. This was seen, for example, by the expansive social policies on welfare, health and education of the very free-spending and reformist Whitlam era as compared with the austerity of the subsequent Fraser government. The demographic and economic situation and social aspirations within Australian society, in turn, influence how and what governments may do in response to committees of inquiry. However, in recent times electoral mandates have often been used as a justification for governments to carry out unpopular actions. An example is the current Federal Government “renegeing on an election campaign commitment not to increase the number of Australian soldiers serving in Iraq” (Bowden, 2005).

In continuing the trend of review and renew, the current Federal Government delivered a series of discussion papers entitled *Higher Education at the Crossroads* in 2002, with the stated intention of reviewing and changing the system. These papers, their implications and possible implementation, have the potential to again radically alter higher education in Australia in ways that will affect its citizens for at least the next generation and possibly well beyond. If the proposed changes result in more Australians with graduate degrees or above, then we will be moving towards the *Clever Country* goal espoused in the Green and White Papers released by the Education Minister, John Dawkins, during the Hawke Labor Government of 1988-1989. If fewer individuals choose the path of higher education, for whatever reason, such as distance from a resident campus or lack of financial means then, as a nation, we will be moving further away from the *Clever Country* ideal. We will continue to lose ground against other OECD nation states and to become uncompetitive in a

world of increasingly globalised and knowledge-based economies. The rhetoric in all of these Government papers proffers the hope of an improved quality of higher education for all. In reality, however, it often seems to be chiefly focussed on the immediate budgetary cost to the country, rather than viewed as an investment in its future — on monetary matters rather than on excellence of teaching, learning and research and their value to Australia as a whole (Bradley, 1999:3-5).

In the past two or three decades, under a system initially introduced by the then Labor Government, universities have been forced by successive government policies to become more competitive, market-driven and corporatised (Ladwig, 1999). Neoliberal ideals provide for less and still reducing levels of public funding and a need for universities to source private funding for research and teaching (Marginson, 2001:2). It flies in the face of the philosophy that universities exist not just for the benefit of the student earning a degree but for the benefit that person will repay to society in raising its levels of acquired knowledge and socio-economic status (Sharp, 1986:68). The benefits that accrue to society include the preservation of democracy and the Foucauldian notion of ‘good citizens.’ Better-educated citizens are more able to be self-reliant, are more likely to be healthier, more affluent and more law-abiding, thus benefiting the whole of society through a flow-on socio-economic effect (Woods, 2002).

### **From colonial times to 1945**

Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, Australians wishing to attend university returned to ‘the old country’ – to Britain — as there were neither such institutions in the colonies at the time, nor a perceived need for them by those in power in either country in the first few years of our nation’s history. Education was not made compulsory at elementary level until the 1870s, but was still usually only

accessible by those who could afford it. Although some grammar schools and colleges were established soon after, higher education was not seen as a priority in the colonies until after the First World War.

Before federation each colony in Australia was still very much a separate outpost of Britain. Even though four of the colonies gained separate legislatures under the British Government's Australian Colonies Government Act between 1823 and 1859, strong ties to 'the old country' ensured a continuation of British traditions and most of its social structures. Education was also modelled on the English system. Higher education was expensive and therefore available only to the wealthy whose children could afford to travel to Britain to attend university there (McCreadie, 1998).

Formalised teacher education did not begin in Australia until 1834. Teaching staff in schools comprised almost anyone who could read and write and who was willing to take on what was a very poorly paid and low status profession. Very few of them had any training or experience at all. Some were very young people with little secondary education themselves but were apprenticed as pupil-teachers at the age of fourteen. The establishment of the Normal or Model School in Sydney in 1842 (Barcan, 1980:43) provided only three to six months training. This was extended to two years in 1888; male and female teachers being trained in separate colleges until 1905, when the institutions were combined into the Sydney Teachers' College. Teacher training in other colonies was even more sporadic, the Melbourne Teachers' College not being established until 1889 (Maclaine, 1975:221).

Tertiary education did not really commence in Australia until the mid-nineteenth century with the establishment of the University of Sydney in 1851. Like many of the first universities in Australia, it was conservative and followed British

‘Oxbridge’ and European traditions. It is one of what are now often referred to as the ‘sandstone’ universities. These were generally constructed of sandstone and usually in the neo-gothic style of the late nineteenth century. The exception of the University of Western Australia, which though also built of sandstone, follows the American Spanish style of architecture (Coaldrake, 1998:9). Thanks largely to private bequests and donations most of these older universities are the wealthiest in Australia and hold the highest prestige internationally (Manne, 19 May 2003 and Maclaine, 1975). The major influences on higher education were colonial, at least until the time of federation, and the rivalry between New South Wales and Victoria saw the University of Melbourne founded soon after Sydney, followed by the University of Adelaide in 1876. Enrolments were initially very small, reflecting Australian society’s low priority for higher education. In 1880 there were only seventy-six students and a staff of six at Sydney and approximately two hundred students at Melbourne at a time when Australia’s population was around 2.3 million. Australia’s first technical college opened its doors in Ballarat in regional Victoria in 1870 (Crittenden, 1989:70). There had been some mechanics’ institutes since the 1820s in several colonies and these eventually led the way to the setting up of technical colleges (Maclaine, 1975:201). The University of Adelaide took in its first students in 1876 but in its first five years, only five degrees were conferred at a cost of over fifty thousand pounds (\$100,000). Even in today’s terms, \$100,000 was a lot of money for a university education but, if the current Government’s proposed changes come into effect, then some students could again be expected to pay that sum or considerably more for some degree courses, particularly medicine, dentistry, law and veterinary science (Oakes interview with Nelson, 18 May 2003).

In Western Australia, due possibly to its remoteness and much smaller resident population, higher education began much later than in the eastern states. As its population has grown, so has the number of universities. Commencing with the University of Western Australia in 1911 — sixty years after the University of Sydney — WA had five universities in 2003, with far-flung branch campuses across the State catering to a number of regional and rural communities. Murdoch University was established in 1975 as a traditional university with a strong research and teaching base (Algie, 1997:4.1). Curtin University evolved from an Institute of Technology and Edith Cowan University developed from a college of advanced education as a result of the Dawkins' reforms. Edith Cowan University emerged in 1991 from an amalgamation of the various teachers' colleges, including the WA Academy of Performing Arts and now also includes the Police Academy at its Joondalup campus. Perth Technical College opened in 1900; then later developed into the Western Australian Institute of Technology and later became Curtin University of Technology in 1986, combining other campuses including the WA School of Mines in Kalgoorlie founded in 1902 (Algie, 1997:4.1 and at <http://www.official.curtin.edu.au/history.html>). Western Australia also hosts one of only two private universities in Australia. The University of Notre Dame is a private, Catholic institution that commenced in 1990 in Fremantle and offers both undergraduate and graduate studies by coursework and research. It has a campus in Broome, Western Australia with courses which target the needs of its local population and also now has a campus in Sydney, New South Wales (<http://www.ndu.edu.au>, 21/11/2005).

All of Western Australia's universities have established regional branch campuses to provide tertiary education advantages to rural and remote communities

and these will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. In many of these regional higher education campuses, the university branches are established in combined sites with Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. This has the advantage of sharing resources and reducing some of the overheads to governments and those local communities where the cost of two separate further education establishments would be prohibitive.

In the early years, Australian universities followed the classic traditional curricula. Until much later in the nineteenth century they continued teaching Latin, Greek and mathematics and were slow to expand their curricula into more humanist subjects. Melbourne was the first to do so and in 1855 added English, history and geography to its original syllabus. It was considered in the late nineteenth century that the ‘population of Tasmania was too small and too poor to sustain a university’ and instead provided eight scholarships each year to universities in Britain (Barcan, 1980:119-127). Colonial hegemony continued to influence Australian society and its fledgling technical and higher education systems until after the end of the Second World War.

The severe depression in the 1890s in all of the colonies except Western Australia saw little advancement in education until the reforms in the first years of the twentieth century. These reforms, while raising the quality and accessibility of secondary education, did little to standardise the system even within each of the separate States. Little practical preparation was made to equip students to attend universities or technical colleges and there were many complaints from academics that the entering students were too immature and lacked the necessary skills (Barcan, 1980:208).

The gold rush in Western Australia saved its economy from the worst of the depression and culminated in the establishment of the School of Mines in Kalgoorlie. Perth Technical College was established in 1900 and the Claremont Teachers' College followed in 1902.

During the First World War more than half of the male teachers employed in all Australian States enlisted in the armed forces. This placed the school systems under great pressure and salaries for teachers were cut drastically. The working conditions were harsh and difficult (Barcan, 1980:241).

In 1918 the Commonwealth Government funded a scheme to train returned service people in the State universities and technical colleges. This scheme ran for approximately five years. The worldwide depression between the two world wars forced another decline in education at all levels including staff salaries and conditions, class sizes and resources. Many schools and colleges amalgamated or were closed due to their straitened circumstances, though two new regional university colleges were established as branch campuses. The Canberra University College was established in 1929 as an affiliate of the University of Melbourne but evolved into the Australian National University in 1946 (Barcan, 1980:335). The Armadale University College in New South Wales, originally attached to the University of Sydney, became the University of New England in 1954 with a priority of external courses, particularly in-service training for country teachers (Barcan, 1980:331).

The Second World War again disrupted higher education in Australia, and the Commonwealth Government of the time used its wartime authority to direct manpower and to control entry into all of the universities, teachers' and technical colleges. Exemptions from active service were granted to students who qualified for

what were considered essential services such as medicine, dentistry, engineering, agriculture and science. Financial assistance was granted to eligible students subject to a means test (Maclaine, 1975:241). Immediately after the war the minimum school leaving age was raised in all states except Queensland. This, in turn, raised the need for further teacher training as the number of secondary schools again expanded. The Commonwealth Government again moved into higher education with the establishment of the Universities Commission and the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, to supervise the exempted students during the war and the retraining scheme for ex-service people immediately after the war. During the five years after end of the Second World War, the influx of students resulted in an increase of 106 per cent in the numbers of undergraduates in Australia's universities. There was a corresponding increase in funding for permanent buildings and resources as universities struggled to cope (Barcan, 1980:289 and Coaldrake, 1998:12). As the returned services cohort graduated, however, student numbers again declined and as they did so, the available Federal funding also diminished and universities were again in crisis as state governments found it increasingly difficult to provide sufficient budget allocations.

### **1945 to 1971**

During this period there was strong economic growth in most Western societies including Australia. This new prosperity saw increased spending on health, social welfare and, particularly, education (Brown *et al*, 1997:1-3). Government policies and programmes from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s led to rapid expansion - the so-called move from an 'elite' to a 'mass' higher education - in an attempt to provide places for all students who achieved the requisite standards. Since that time, however, shrinking education budgets and changes in government

priorities have seen a slowing of the overall rate of growth in higher education compared with that which occurred during that post-war period.

The number of students undertaking higher education has continued to grow as it has become more readily accessible to more Australians and as the population has dramatically increased in the past fifty years (Harman, 1980:6-7). The number of universities has also increased rapidly from nineteen in 1974 to 39 in 2002. Some of this increase is due to more campuses being built but also to some colleges being reclassified, such as the Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) and sometimes referred to as the “post-1989 universities.”

The beginning of the 1950s heralded fifty years of development and transformation in higher education as successive Federal governments initiated various enquiries and put new policies into practice. One of the greatest expansions was during the Menzies era, from December 1949 to Australia Day 1966, as he was a strong supporter, not only of higher education, but also of the independence and autonomy of universities and the protection of their academic freedom (Bessant, 2002:55). The Murray Report was tabled in 1957 and, perhaps because its Chairman, Sir Keith Murray, was recruited from the University Grants Commission in Britain, ‘reaffirmed the British traditions and practices of Australia’s universities supporting the ideal of academic freedom’ (Bessant, 2002:56). The Report sought to address the high failure rate of students, noting that 39 per cent of students failed in their first year and only 58 per cent graduated. The report showed this to be from a variety of causes. In particular, bridging the gap between school and university, not adequately preparing students for university life, heavy study loads, problems with teaching methods and lack of student guidance (Gallagher, 2001:10 and McInnis, 1995:112). In 1998, a Murdoch University study of first year students showed that up to 20 per

cent dropped out in their first year, so it is still a major issue (Ballantyne, 1998:6). To some extent, Australian universities have since dealt with many of the issues raised in the Murray Report. Some still remain though, including the first year drop out rate, and a level of unconnectedness by external and part-time students who are often unable (due to distance, work and other commitments) to take part in on-campus activities and groups (McInnis, 1995:115). Most Australian universities now have programmes in place to assist first year students to adapt to their new surroundings.

The Murray Report largely ignored the growing number of external students in Australia at the time, believing that face-to-face lectures and tutorials were the most valued method of teaching and learning in universities and that distance and off-campus learning were inferior and unsatisfactory (Zeegers, 2000:4). Murray advocated the older style of university with residential campuses, but this did not take into account the need to accommodate those students who had to fit study into and around their work schedules due to the changes in employment and lifestyles in Australia.

The Murray Report found that State grants to universities amounted to 50.3 per cent, student fees 15.6 per cent of total income, the Commonwealth Government 29.2 per cent, and advocated an increase in Federal funding. Although the Federal Government was sceptical of the Report's proposals, it accepted the recommendation and did increase its grants, thereby increasing the Commonwealth's financial backing of the higher education system in Australia to \$2,256,000 (Coaldrake, 1998:13, Barcan, 1980:333 and AAS, undated webpage).

The huge post-Second World War increase in the number of students caused enormous pressure on Australia's universities; this led to the formation of the Martin

Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Leslie Martin in 1961 (Coaldrake, 1998:13 and Barcan, 1980:333). The Committee studied British and United States higher education systems, particularly the Robbins Committee of Inquiry in the UK. Its terms of reference were to “consider the pattern of tertiary education in relation to the needs and resources of Australia and make recommendations to the Australian Universities Commission (AUC) on the future development of tertiary education” (Smart, 1986:205). The enquiry took three years and its report was tabled in 1964. The AUC held its first meeting in August 1959 with Martin as full-time Chairman and four part-time advisers, two chosen for their expertise in academic affairs and two from industry and commerce. One of its recommendations was that there was little point in “continuing to create new universities all patterned on the 19<sup>th</sup> century models,” (Davies, 1989:23). Until Martin’s retirement in 1966, the Commission oversaw the most extensive expansion and some major changes to create the binary system of higher education in Australia.

The main outcome of the Martin Report was the adoption of what became known as the binary system in Australia. This was similar to the UK model of the time and separated higher education into two levels. The first tier was made up of universities and the second of what became colleges of advanced education, institutes of technology, agricultural, mining and teachers’ colleges (Roberts, 2000:9, Davies, 1989:2, Barcan, 1980:339 and Richardson, 1972:2). Universities were to concentrate on research with promotions among academic staff dependent on the level and quality of the research they conducted. Universities were the only institutions able to award degrees. Colleges of Advanced Education were seen as a cheaper form of higher education for those not wishing to attend universities but they could only issue diplomas. These colleges were for the most part, conversions of the

old institutes of technology, schools of mines, art schools, conservatoria and agricultural colleges, with teachers' colleges not becoming CAEs until the 1970s (Bessant, 2002:60).

Enrolments continued to climb throughout the sixties as the 'baby boomers' reached the age of university entrance (Coaldrake, 1998:14). School leavers continued to make up the majority of students in this period. Another important result of the Martin Report was a move to decentralise tertiary education into regional areas to reduce the pressure on, particularly, the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne. It also signified a much stronger interest and influence by the Commonwealth Government in tertiary education and was central to its policy-making at the time (Bain, 1971:1 and 63). The period from 1963 to 1975 saw the establishment of the Commonwealth Department of Education and 'unparalleled expansion' in Commonwealth involvement in all levels of education and training (Smart, 1982:15). Each of the States was allocated different amounts of Commonwealth funding to set up the new colleges of advanced education, according to their willingness to comply with the Government's guidelines (Barcan, 1980:340). Per capita funding for universities was much higher than for CAEs.

In retrospect, much of the Martin Report has been criticised. Many of its recommendations were rejected, including the proposals that no new universities be established until 1975, and that part-time and external studies should be discontinued in the universities but not necessarily in the colleges (Coaldrake, 1998:83 and Bessant, 2002:59).

In a century of rapid and pervasive change, the 1960s were perhaps the most cataclysmic. Society's values and attitudes were affected as old truisms were replaced by uncertainties and anxieties at the beginning of the Cold War. The new

'permissive' society brought about a restlessness still felt in today's post-modern culture. Australia was moving away from the last vestiges of its colonial heritage and increasingly looked toward the United States for protection and inspiration. The world was beginning to become 'global' and much 'smaller' due to the emergence of new forms of telecommunications. Around the world, student unrest was a common factor in raising awareness of many political and social issues, including opposition to the Vietnam War and the Cold War arms race, support for feminism, environmental sustainability and many other issues. The students also called for a greater democratisation of universities and new study programmes that were more relevant to their needs (Coaldrake, 1998:16).

### **The Whitlam era and its radical social changes**

When the Australian Labor Party was elected to Federal Government in 1972 after a twenty-three year absence, it began a new era in federalism, particularly with regard to higher education (Milne, 2001:2). Its strong social platforms included greater access and equity for minority groups and those with special needs and the promise that education would be the "most rapidly growing sector of public spending." Whitlam also abolished fees for tertiary study on 1 January 1974, believing entry to university should be on merit only not socio-economic status (Barcan, 1980:387). In Labor's first year of office Federal expenditure on education doubled and continued to expand. The Kangan Committee was set up in 1973 to study post-compulsory education not already funded by the AUC and the Commission on Advanced Education. As a result of its Report in 1974, spending for technical and further education increased almost four-fold (Barcan, 1998:392). Also in 1974, the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme replaced the earlier

Commonwealth scholarships, except those for post-graduate study. The new Scheme assisted all students in approved courses subject to a means test.

During 1974, inflation and unemployment increased dramatically, causing the government to slow its high expenditure on education (Barcan, 1980:393). The Whitlam Government's tenure was short, a little under three years, but its impact on higher education was massive. Much that was achieved by it remained in place throughout the recessionary years of the Fraser Coalition Government. However there were two changes initiated by the Fraser administration that have had long-term effects. One was that tenure of academics became less and less secure over time (Hobart *The Mercury*, May 2, 1981, p. 2). The second, in 1975, was a reduction in higher education funding, in real terms, and this has continued to the present day (Begg, 1998:9). Unemployment and inflation continued to escalate throughout the Fraser government era and the early years of the Hawke Labor Government, which followed in 1983.

### **Dawkins and the 'clever country'**

As a result of Dawkins' White Paper of 1987, higher education was again radically revolutionised during the Hawke Federal Labor Government. Dawkins assumed complete "control of higher education management and programme delivery through his own department" (Kemp, 2002). Universities were compelled to change their traditional professorial and academic bodies to become more like corporate boards of directors and research funding became more difficult to obtain unless for work with a 'commercial' outcome. During this time, universities also became a significant 'export industry' with the introduction of full-fee paying foreign students (Hyde, 2003:244).

Dawkins, as Minister for Employment, Education and Training, introduced the Unified National System in 1989 to replace the earlier binary system of the Martin Report in 1964. In his view, the traditional universities would have to change to become commercial entities and CAEs would also be converted into universities. Although some of those colleges already undertook applied research (for example the Western Australian Institute of Technology which then became Curtin University) they were not usually research institutes nor did they have vice chancellors, professors or other academic staff as in the universities. As the colleges became universities, however, their directors became vice-chancellors with staffs of professors and associate professors without the more traditional career paths of academe.

In a sweeping move Dawkins forced the amalgamation of many smaller CAE campuses into universities. Many of these were the colleges of advanced education that were forced to merge with universities to attract government funding as a result of the Dawkins Unified National System (UNS) of reform in 1989. Those colleges of advanced education of the Martin era were reclassified as universities by the UNS reforms at the demise of the Binary System (Duke, 2000:2).

One example of the changes to classification is the Western Australian Institute of Technology, now known as Curtin University. Edith Cowan University, which has the oldest higher education campus in Western Australia, began in 1902 as the Claremont Teachers College. It became a college of advanced education that also included the other Teachers' Colleges, the WA Academy of Performing Arts and the School of Nursing, before again changing to become an accredited university.

Where “there had been eighteen universities and forty-seven CAEs in 1985, these were reformed in to thirty universities by 1991 and thirty-five by 1994”

(Coaldrake, 1998:19). Some of the earlier universities and CAEs had several campuses, often hundreds of kilometres apart. Without the benefit of modern telecommunications many of these became difficult to administer and were dissolved. However, many still exist and flourish, including some universities with several distant campuses, such as Curtin, Edith Cowan and Notre Dame in Western Australia. Modern technology and communication systems have made administration of distance campuses much easier than in 1987. These small branch campuses in regional and rural areas give greater access to higher education for country students, particularly in Western Australia where there are vast distances and sparse populations. These far-reaching new management bureaucracies bore little resemblance to the traditional universities, reduced their ability to govern themselves with a corresponding loss of academic freedom and collegiality (Bessant, 2002:61).

Dawkins' Green Paper referred to a 'clever country.' This phrase caught public attention and has become common currency. It is quoted in many a discussion since about higher education and the nation's place in the modern world, much more so than its evolution into the 'knowledge nation' by Beazley in 2001. The theory behind the 'clever country' was that 'education ... would be co-opted in the national interest ... to ensure a competitive nation in the global marketplace' (Knight, 1996:4). The emphasis was on making higher education available to everyone and preparing Australia and Australians to take an active role, not only in their own communities but also increasingly in national and international functions. The later report by the Knowledge Nation Taskforce emphasized the importance of increased funding for higher education — "we can become a knowledge nation, or we can become a poor nation," as Leader of the Opposition, Beazley stated in his acceptance of this report by the Australian Labor Party when (2 July 2001). However, there has

been a continuing decline in the rate of public funding per capita since the Whitlam era (Crittenden, 1989:71) which does not augur well either for the knowledge nation or for Australia. Economic rationalism is unlikely to deliver either the quantity or quality of university education this country needs and deserves.

Roderick West, Chair of yet another federal government review released in 1998, while describing higher education as an industry and recommending further corporatisation of universities, was alarmed at the result of some of the most rigid cost cutting, “In satisfying the demand for efficiency in management, an enterprise may lose sight of its ideals, of its humanity and even its professional integrity. If this happens, there is no true efficiency,” quoted in Bessant (2002:75).

### **Australian universities then and now**

At the outbreak of the First World War there were only six universities established in Australia, one in each state capital; this number gradually increased after the Second World War. Many of the new universities are classified as ‘red brick’ which referred to their construction of red brick rather than sandstone and, in most cases, was a comment on their utilitarian design common in post-Second World War Australia. The term is also often used in Australia to imply that they are not as high-status as the sandstone universities.

Universities have been redefined over the years by outside groups, especially political parties with agendas other than the benefit of university communities made up of general and academic staff and students (Biggs, 2002:191). Student numbers have increased at a rate faster than those of staff, class sizes are larger, while many tutorials have disappeared, and administration has become a bureaucratic nightmare. Universities are forced to look to funding from interested parties and this has raised

doubts about the impartiality of some research outcomes, concern over the ownership of intellectual property and the rights of authors to publish. Knowledge has become a commodity rather than a service for the benefit of all humanity.

Secondary school leavers are still the main body of students entering higher education but mature age entrance has seen an increasing proportion of older students, particularly in the newer universities that tend to endorse broader categories of enrolment in their student base, as have external study and on-line learning. This community participation is perhaps in recognition of the need for lifelong learning, often two or more “careers” in our working lives.

There is a line of discussion that the university of the future will be a virtual rather than a physical space but there will always be a place for the more traditional university, as there will always be a place for printed books. Universities as institutions have survived millennia by adapting with their local societies and they will continue to adapt to the future if they are provided the wherewithal to do so. New teaching and learning strategies are being assisted by distance, on-line course delivery and the ease with which the Internet and email can connect academics and students in all parts of the world, whether from the middle of major cities or in small remote stations in the outback of Australia and elsewhere. The libraries of the world are at students’ fingertips and email chat-lines allow for debate on any subject of common interest or research. Virtual universities have already been set up in Canada and France and are planned elsewhere.

### **Who pays the ferryman?**

It is uncertain what the future holds for higher education in this country. Bradley (1999:1) states that “widening of the gulf between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’,

rapid technological change, the convergence of information and communication technologies and a globalised economy all contribute to an uncertain and unpredictable future. While much is unclear it does seem there is widespread agreement that education will be a critical determinant of the future success not just of individuals but of nations.” In Canada, for example, “Virtually all net job creation since 1990 has required that job applicants have a higher education” (Consumer Trends Report, 2005 Chapter 4). Professor Allan Fels, in *The Impact of Competition Policy and Law on Higher Education in Australia* (1998:1-4) stated that “the increasingly competitive higher education environment has led ... to the repositioning of the student as a customer or client; in short, the commodification of education.” He also stated that “there has ... been a move away from the concept of teaching and research activities undertaken by universities in the normal course of their work for the benefit of society as a whole, towards the idea that they are something that bring advantages to particular groups and individuals who ought, therefore, to pay for them,” (1998:4).

As political priorities change and available funds decrease, there are some who would seem to advocate a return to elitism where only those who can afford to pay full fees should attend university rather than the broader and more equitable system which has existed since the Whitlam era (Manning, 2002:7, Meryment, 2002). Some of this change has to do with the economic rationalisation of recent governments and reduced funding to higher education, but also it is partly as a result of Australian society’s traditional disaffection with higher education and their reluctance to pay for an indefinable benefit they do not see as accruing directly to them (Milne, 2001:2).

University education for domestic students has over the years gone from what was originally a user pays system, to free and now again to a user pays system with a variety of taxpayer-funded loans, such as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme. The latest changes have occurred as a result of the Higher Education Review conducted via the series of *Crossroads* papers, but this will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

It may be difficult to determine who should pay and how much. Especially so, if universities are to exist now as corporate entities and market themselves in competition with other institutions in Australia and overseas, as the financial and other benefits will accrue to the nation as well as to the student client. In a market situation an organisation will presumably be able to determine the cost of producing its goods and the profit margin it needs to generate in order to stay in business. It will also need to determine just who its purchasers or clients are likely to be. In higher education, as in all other levels of education, the intended or direct purchaser is usually the student but increasingly, the university may sell its knowledge and results of its research to outside organisations in industry and commerce. When setting the level of fees to students, however, it would be unfair if the university did not take its other clients into consideration along with the socio-economic benefit accruing to the wider community, this being the most difficult issue to quantify (Dirk, 1998:3). Certainly the university can calculate the cost of a particular degree to a particular student but it is perhaps not so easy for a reluctant society to decide the value of that exchange to itself and accept its proportion of the cost.

Peter Baldwin, Federal Minister for Education, in 1993-1995 implemented a quality assurance system into higher education. Quality assurance systems are subjective, however, as they are specific to the context for which they are designed.

Definitions of quality differ depending on the real or implied context. Too often in recent higher education policy-making, they refer to meeting the demands of the market rather than the quality of the teaching and learning environment (Kisuniene, 1997:1). While quality assurance may seem relevant to something readily quantifiable, as engineering for example, it is difficult to see how it can be applied to something as unfettered as the quest for and dissemination of knowledge should be. Under the Australian Qualifications Framework, all Australian universities are self-accrediting (<http://www.aqf.edu.au/>). There is not at present, nor would it be fair and reasonable, to have a system which judges all universities according to one scale. Quality assurance is a very disputed concept, which varies from one university and one campus to another, depending on each institution's policies and "social, historical and cultural backgrounds [and] the individual ideologies which surround it. It is not tied in with economic and strictly market oriented functions," (Galea, 2001:4). It would be inequitable, for example, to rank a small regional university campus on the same scale as one of the country's oldest and more recognised, as the latter would have enormous advantages in established capital assets and reputation both in Australia and overseas. Yet the smaller regional institutions may have a greater value in some areas if they are responsive to their local communities and provide courses which are not available elsewhere, such as mining-based courses at the Curtin University School of Mines campus in Kalgoorlie. Economic rationalism and its attendant tools for "efficiency and productivity gains" are alien to the philosophy of universities and have exacerbated the destabilisation of academia (Bostock, 2002:28). In the five years between 1989 and 1994 alone, the ratio of students to staff has increased by 13% while the real funding rate decreased by 2.5% (Martin, 1997). While this shows a gain in efficiency in monetary terms it has not

necessarily provided a corresponding gain in the quality of teaching and learning. This trend has continued to the point where some lectures have become overcrowded and tutorials cancelled due to lack of funding for some courses.

In 1996-97 Federal funding to higher education was approximately \$5.5 billion with income from international students more than \$6 billion (AVCC submission 29/04/1997). In 2000, “government expenditure on higher education [was] \$5 billion, ... [in return the government received approximately] \$3 billion - in income tax from academics: (\$1billion), \$1 billion from student HECS repayments and \$1 billion from student fees” (AAC, February 2000:1). This shows a nett cost to the Federal government of only \$2 billion for the year without taking into consideration the other benefits accrued to the community through other spending by students and staff and income from overseas students. If the less quantifiable benefits to Australian society such as the increases in intellectual and social capital were to have a dollar value placed on them, surely this would make higher education a very profitable institution for the country rather than a drain on its budget as is constantly alleged.

In 1988 under the Higher Education Funding Act, the Commonwealth introduced a move away from tuition-free higher education to a system of ‘user pays’ contributions by students. Higher education institutions, the Australian Taxation Office and the Department of Education, Science and Training, administer the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) jointly. Students pay a percentage of the cost of their education usually on a sliding scale depending on their programme of study and varies between twenty-six and eighty per cent (Australia DETYS, 1999:14). The remainder of the cost is borne by the Federal government (Australia, DEST, 2003). The advantage of this Scheme is that many students who

would not otherwise be able to afford to enter higher education can now do so and defer the repayment of their contribution to the cost of that education to a time when they are in paid work. The main disadvantage is that the loan can become a long-term financial burden to students who are unable to achieve an income level equivalent to the scale required to repay it.

### **Governance, autonomy and academic freedom**

Historically, universities in most countries have until fairly recently been predominantly autonomous institutions unfettered by political and market influences; “they were funded from a variety of sources and governments assumed they knew best how to manage themselves” (Smart, 1997:30), or as Bergan put it in Bologna (2001:52) “the state pays and then leaves the university to set its own priorities.” Universities are one of the few institutions to have survived relatively intact from the middle ages. The first ‘modern’ university that awarded degrees is believed to have been the Medicorum Collegium in Salerno in Southern Italy founded in the ninth century to teach Arab, Jewish and classical medicine in a faculty rather than master-tutor situation (Carr, 1999:1). Other early universities were the Alazhar University in Cairo established in 970 AD, and Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge early in the next millennium; all were allowed autonomy and academic freedom as long as they “did not preach heresy” (Bostock, 2002:2).

Academic traditions of governance in Australian universities derived from the Oxbridge and German models, as did their original curricula (Coaldrake, 1998:37). As our society and higher education have evolved and “become more democratic,” universities are expected, and have become, less the ‘ivory towers’ of the past but more ‘useful,’ practical and ‘relevant’” institutions, more engaged with

and answerable to their wider communities. As universities became larger, more corporatised organisations, they accepted that the traditional concepts of governance, administration and academic freedom have also had to change to more closely match society's expectations. The extent of such expectations has, however, now become unworkable and unrealistic (Coaldrake, 1998:147-8). Societies have come to expect that higher education will:

... become more flexible in its course and curriculum offerings in order to meet the new educational needs of a learning society. [It] also expects higher education to link its curriculum offerings, its research agendas and its public service offerings more closely to [its] social and economic needs. This expectation of relevance raises the issue, for example, of how to balance traditional emphases on general education and free inquiry into the "pure" realms of knowledge with a more pragmatic emphasis on meeting society's current needs. These increased expectations of flexibility and relevance come at a time when new political and economic forces are making it increasingly difficult to sustain historic financial commitments to higher education. The federal government, for example, is shifting responsibility for many social programs to the states, often without transferring enough resources to cover the full historic costs of such programs. This shift and other social and economic changes dictate that higher education's leaders

and supporters rededicate themselves to optimising the collective investment in higher education (Graves, 1996:1).

Since the end of the Second World War, governments around the world have sought to control higher education to serve the need for an ever more skilled workforce and competition on a global scale. The Dawkins reforms in 1987 were “probably the single most effective instrument in Australia in reducing the universities’ ability to manage themselves in their time-honoured methods of considered debate and deliberation” (Smart, 1997:29-34).

Real autonomy in academia has been described as perhaps a myth in modern times, or at least an illusion (Bergan, 2001:49-67). If they are to be able to conduct impartial research and teaching, the independence and autonomy of universities is even more essential to democratic societies in the twenty-first century than at any previous time in history. Higher education, in addition to its two major functions of research and teaching, is also the guardian of society’s intellectual standards and integrity. Universities must have a high degree of autonomy if they are to continue to perform these functions effectively both nationally and internationally.

The Dawkins’ White Paper, in reviewing the accountability of universities, introduced measures, which effectively reduced their level of academic freedom (Hyde, 2003:244). In order to gain federal funding and ‘status awards’, Australian universities were coerced into surrendering not only their autonomy but also their academic freedom to choose their own research priorities (Smart, 1991:99-100). Politicians and government departments with little or no experience or expertise in the field were suddenly ordering academia in matters of research, teaching and administration. Australian governments have not been alone in undertaking such

programmes. Many overseas studies have been done on the subversion of higher education and the detrimental effects these are having on their quality and independence (Biggs, 2002:1,19). The fundamental principles of higher education as laid down by the UNESCO World Conference on Education: Reform and Innovation (1998:1) are that:

in our complex and rapidly changing global society, higher education must contribute to the building of peace founded on a process of development and predicated on equity, justice, solidarity and liberty. To attain this objective, access on the basis of merit, the renovation of systems and institutions, and service to society, including closer links to the world of work, must be the basis of renewal and renovation in this level of education. This requires that higher education enjoy autonomy and freedom exercised with responsibility.

Good governance has in recent times been confused with economic rationalism by political interests, more concerned with saving money than with providing an outstanding higher education system. Universities have been forced to tread a delicate line between being public benefit institutions with the autonomy to govern themselves according to their expertise and becoming market-driven corporations with their own attendant pressures of commercial management (Flinders, 2003:5). It is increasingly difficult for universities to function within this dual identity crisis and continue to provide high quality research and teaching.

The loss of autonomy, collegiality and academic freedom have caused much consternation amongst academics and students in recent times and this will continue

to worsen unless there are positive reforms leading to a more effective balance between appropriate safeguards to accountability and self-governance (Smart, 1997:40). The consequences will be far-reaching and damaging to the fabric and quality of the higher education system in the future. This will impact on the expertise of universities and their ability to conduct objective and impartial research and teaching. It will encourage an environment that may force institutions to compete with each other rather than collaborate and share diminishing resources. There is clearly a need for the reconvening of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) dismantled by the Dawkins Government in 1987, or a similarly independent body of experts in the field to advise governments on higher education and, hopefully, lead to an improved higher education system. A more varied mix of funding would also have the effect of reducing the current levels of Federal control over Australia's universities and return to them some measure of independence (Smart, 1997:36-40). Higher education has not been served well by constant political intervention which has "reconstituted it as an industry and its various institutions ... treated as competing enterprises operating in a market setting" (Knight, 1996:5). It is difficult to maintain autonomy and stability in universities "when policy makers are limited by the end of their electoral mandate," (Bergan, 2001:63).

It is also problematic whether, as competing enterprises, universities will be able to continue to fund their regional campuses. As banking and other organisations have been forced to retreat from regional centres toward the more populous, and therefore easier to support, cities so may regional campuses be unable to remain viable. The Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services in its *Report Of The Inquiry Into Infrastructure And The Development Of Australia's Regional Areas* (2000:1) states that "those in the metropolitan and some large

provincial areas continue to gain improved access to all areas of infrastructure and in particular, telecommunications, while those in the traditional heartland of regional and rural Australia face the prospect of declining access to many services and a lack of improvement in infrastructure.” I believe it would be tragic for the country’s future if such an uneven distribution of benefits, services and facilities were to continue.

### **Should Australian universities be ranked on a world scale?**

The Group of Eight Secretariat was formed in Canberra in 2000, on the premise that higher education was at the time hampered by government policies, that its importance to Australia’s society and economy was increasing and that Australia needed to have at least some universities that are considered internationally to be among the world’s top one hundred (Group of Eight (Go8), 2001). The Group of Eight universities is made up of five of the original ‘sandstone’ universities: The University of Sydney, The University of Melbourne, The University of Queensland, and The University of Western Australia, The University of Adelaide, plus three ‘red brick’ universities — the Australian National University, Monash University and The University of New South Wales. These are considered nationally and internationally to be Australia’s leading universities. They undertake approximately 70 per cent of all basic research conducted in Australia and produce in the vicinity of 70 per cent of internationally recognised publications. The National University in Canberra, established in 1946 as a research institution with postgraduate studies only, has the highest proportion of citations and publications (Coaldrake, 1998:13, 25 and Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) 1999).

As previously mentioned, the history of higher education began in Australia in the mid-nineteenth century with universities modelled on the British system.

There are now 39 universities in Australia and though none is ranked in the top one hundred in the world, they are informally 'ranked' nationally. The oldest in Australia, and often referred to as 'sandstone universities', are possibly the most traditional and conservative; they have strong priorities in research though they are not always the largest institutions nor do they necessarily have the highest numbers of students. The ranking may be because of their body of research, for example the Australian National University. Those ranked as the top eight are not all 'sandstone' universities and only the University of Western Australia is included from WA. Many of the newer universities also have strong research priorities and innovative programmes.

There is much discussion currently about being ranked with other OECD countries and whether just one or two Australian universities should be elevated to world-class status (Nelson, 2002). This would seem to imply that Australian universities are not up to world standards, yet most are excellent and some have individual course programmes that are internationally highly ranked, particularly in the fields of business and veterinary and medical sciences, for example, the School of Veterinary Science at Murdoch University in Western Australia. World ranking would promote international partnership in research programmes for Australian universities and would enhance the nation's educational standing overseas but it would seem of real benefit only to a select few researchers, to international students wishing to study here or Australian students wishing to engage in further study abroad. The large body of Australian students currently can be confident that their local qualifications are of a standard at least equal to most overseas countries and their qualifications would be accredited there (Williams *et al*, 2004).

## **Internationalising higher education – the new focus?**

Neither Australia nor any of its institutions can exist in isolation, either from its neighbours in Asia or from the rest of the world. Globalisation is a name given to the process through which the world has become smaller. One of the reasons it has had such dire publicity is that it is a system of power and dependency. There is a fear that one culture will dominate and others will be subjugated or lost. National boundaries are dissolving as money and information are transferred electronically. Higher education has, to some extent, always been an international profession as academics have travelled between the world's centres of learning, collaborated with each other in research across cultural and geographical boundaries and published in international journals. Bergan (2001:62) argues that while it is important to appreciate the worth of all the different facets of our own culture, we also should accept higher education has a responsibility to see that heritage, history and all the sciences are studied in the wider global perspective as well as national.

Internationalisation of higher education in this country entered a new phase with the entry of full fee-paying students from overseas. It is increasingly important for Australian universities to exist in the global environment to increase their own merit, to encourage cross-cultural understanding and co-operation and to facilitate international mobility of its academic staff and graduates as the world becomes ever smaller (Smart, 1997:40; Currie, 1998:1). As higher education has the capacity to change the attitudes and values of its local society, it is hoped that internationalisation of higher education will positively affect the attitudes and values of the global society towards a prospect of peace, tolerance and understanding.

Sweden was the first country to set up a specific programme to internationalise their education systems. Since then, internationalisation of higher

education has become a worldwide movement encouraging even more than before the importance of sharing knowledge and information across nation states while also recognising the “socio-historical and cultural context within which [each] education system develops and changes” (Burns, 1981:117). The prevailing customs of the time will always culturally influence the framework within which each society produces and disseminates knowledge within the global environment. It is to be hoped that the internationalisation of education will continue to foster exchange of knowledge and co-operation between nation states and not be over-ridden by the neoliberal policies of globalised power and market dominated values (Scott, 2000:1; Chesney, (1999:1-10).

### **Where to from here?**

Despite Australian society’s traditional bias against university education, the community still expects formal education, and more particularly higher education, to positively influence the nation’s economic prosperity. They expect that it will solve both social and economic problems and, to a lesser extent, have the power to produce true equality of opportunity. This has been the driving force of most government education policies particularly in the past forty years and will, hopefully, ensure that Australia will have a viable and world-class higher education system in the future (Crittenden, 1989:89;Richardson, 1972:17).

Perhaps it is too optimistic, though, to expect that governments will in the future ensure that the higher education system is of an extremely high standard. Perhaps it is also rather too hopeful that it should be exempt from constant political intervention and disruption as long as it is accountable to the society it serves and serves it well.

Australia needs, and deserves, a world-class higher education system that is of high quality (Go8.edu.au, 2001). However, raising the standard of just one or two universities to enable them to be classified in the top one hundred in the world will consign the remainder of its higher education system to global oblivion. This will not be an equitable system for the majority of Australians but a return to elitism where only the selected few will be able to afford to enrol at those world-class institutions. What is important is that there should be consultation with all of the stakeholders directly concerned with tertiary systems, that is, academic and general staff, students, community and other agents immediately concerned with teaching, learning and administering our universities and colleges. Only then is Australia likely to implement a quality higher education system that can be seen as worthy both nationally and internationally. Governments do have a legitimate responsibility toward society to ensure that any system of higher education serves its society as best it can and achieves its goals (Berdahl, 1985:4).

There has been much discussion in recent years that higher education should be concentrated on those disciplines that produce a monetary (or commodified) value, such as science, commerce, and medicine and less emphasis on the humanities. This would have a detrimental effect of limiting the extent of general knowledge and critical thinking skills gained and breadth of units studied. For example, “students are [less likely] to be encouraged to take courses in philosophical ethics or religion, business students are not encouraged to pursue minors in ethics, logic, or literature, and science students pursue only the sciences,” (Richards, 2000:1). Universities, since their inception, have existed to add to the sum of the world’s knowledge, to teach and to research, not just to train people to go into professions and occupations (Biggs, 2002:9). Universities are being vocationalised

towards learning that is geared towards future employment rather than the traditional perspective of a “liberal university that disseminated learning for learning’s sake” (Symes, 1998).

The ‘machine bureaucracy’ or top-down managerial styles, which have replaced most of the traditional academic boards in the past fifteen or so years have damaged the fabric of universities (Jaques, 1996). They may fit corporate organisations with a quantifiable product to sell, but they have destabilised higher education to the point where general and academic staff and students are fearful they can no longer perform their true function. Subject to acceptable levels of responsibility to society and for the long term benefit of a democratic society, universities must retain, or reclaim, a level of autonomy and academic freedom that allows them to ‘pursue knowledge where it leads,’ independent of any biases which might ensue from unqualified interference from governments or private funding with preconceived notions not only of what universities should be but what they should research and teach. This requires a level of confidence by Australians but the long-term benefits to its society are worthy of that ‘public trust’ (Biggs, 2002:2).

‘Education for all,’ ‘Knowledge nation’ and the ‘Clever Country’ are political catch-cries and brave and worthy causes given much media coverage. In a world of decreasing funding for education, however, it is not so easy to see how these can become a reality rather than an elusive dream unless the policies of the past few years are reversed.

Australian universities have evolved with Australian society in their century and a half of existence. No one would deny that they are currently in crisis but it is not possible, nor would it be correct, to turn back the clock entirely. That universities are now large businesses with market managerial administration and government

funding allocated often on a year-by-year basis does not bode well for long term planning. For institutions that have existed for centuries to now face such an uncertain future is an alarming prospect. The changes in tenure and loss of collegiality of academics together with the increasing casualisation of so many staff is destabilising in the short term and in the long term will affect the quality of teaching and research in universities (Bostock, 1998:4). Higher education is not, nor should it be, merely a ‘commercial look-alike’ — an ‘industry’ with a product to sell — but the traditional university would seem to have gone forever. To best serve the society of the twenty-first century, higher education must somehow find a way to hold on to its particular responsibilities for independent research and the gathering and dissemination of knowledge. All this in a changed world where some level of corporatisation is inevitable, so the challenge is to take the best of both the traditional and the new and combine them into an institution which will be around for the long term.

### **Chapter three – higher education at the Crossroads**

In 1923 Mencken wrote that “the whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins all of them imaginary” (cited in Hyde, 2003:238).

This chapter offers a critical policy analysis of the *Higher Education at the Crossroads*, a review of undertaken by the Federal Government in 2002-2003. I argue that the official rhetoric of the Review may not match the reality of many regional communities as the proposals are transformed into action. The *Crossroads* Review undertaken by the Federal Government in 2002-2003 will have a huge impact on all of the direct and indirect stakeholders in this country. This is principally because the ensuing modifications will have such a correspondingly huge impact on the future of higher education system and on Australian society. Consequently, this Review has brought forth responses from interested parties, universities, politicians, academics, students and student bodies, vice-chancellors, community groups, the media and the general public. It will affect not only who and how many will attend university, but where those students study, live and work, in the city or in regional areas. It will also have a ripple effect on their local communities. Australia’s position in the world, not just in its ability to provide a world-class level of higher education but also in its ability to compete in all other fields, will be affected by these changes. A university education affects not only those individuals who acquire tertiary qualifications, but all Australians as the consequences of the increase in knowledge which adds to the knowledge capital of each of our communities and cultures. Higher education is a common good whose costs are far outweighed by its benefits, whether quantifiable and definable in such

terms as export earnings or saleable research outcomes, or in the less tangible measurements of an educated, independent and stable society (Dionne *et al*, 1997:2-4). The income tax alone returned to the government over the working life of a university graduate compared with that of a non-graduate is a “tenfold return on its investment,” and this even if the Government paid that person’s full tuition cost (University of Technology Sydney (UTS), undated c.2002:1-4).

In this chapter I want to consider the inherent shortcomings of *Crossroads* on six counts:

1. Dismantling the social contract (social democratic settlement): I argue that governments are increasingly withdrawing from providing adequate funding and support for health, welfare and education with grim consequences for the social contract.
2. Creating the ‘enterprise’ university: I argue that the Federal Government’s priorities aim to turn universities into businesses, of striving for export dollars, and for the student ‘users’ or ‘clients’ paying a considerable portion of their fees.
3. Internationalising education: I argue that the drive to increase export earnings in higher education may have economic consequences for regional Western Australia:
4. Subverting social justice – rhetoric, reality and the latest reviews: I argue that political rhetoric is often couched in terms to confound the individual into believing a particular policy is in her/his best interests when, too often, the reality is very different.
5. Disinvesting in higher education: I argue that expenditure on higher education is a public investment, not a public expenditure.

6. The responses to the papers – the main criticisms and concerns: I argue that while the responses depend on the position of the respondent, there needs to be some consideration given by the government to the special needs of regional communities.
7. Residualising regional provision: the drive for profitability at all costs is to the detriment of an equitable and accessible higher education for all society, including those underprivileged or disadvantaged groups such as regional Western Australians.

### **Dismantling the social contract**

Governments have a moral responsibility, a social contract, to provide adequate and essential institutions for their society (Rawls, 1971, Fletcher, 1988:783; Rousseau, 1763). In return for surrendering certain rights as individuals and the expectation that they will be active and law-abiding citizens, the electorate expects its government will deliver a stable, accountable system of governance that meets the expense of those institutions which society needs in order to exist comfortably in its chosen environment. Without this our society cannot progress, which it needs to do to keep pace with other comparable OECD countries. Australia's GDP has increased by more than 20 per cent in the past thirty years and the "economy does have the resources to fully fund essential services such as health, welfare and education" (Stephen, 2003:4). Yet, at a time when there is wealth enough for all, the gap between rich and poor is increasing and many neoliberal governments in Australia, as in other western democracies, are reducing the means to provide adequately for health, welfare and education. This will create 'gated communities' where governments are emphasising the individual as a 'client' rather than a 'citizen,' (Reid and Blackmore, 2000:1-3). It has serious implications for all Australians and perhaps

much more so for regional populations where facilities are being further reduced, particularly with regard to health and education.

In this new century the political, social and ecological environment seems to shift with each passing day and modern telecommunications and fiscal policies make the world ever smaller. Education, health and social security are the building blocks of nation states. They are equally, if not more important to a modern knowledge nation than to its agrarian predecessor 'riding on the sheep's back.' Citizens have a right to expect that their government will provide those building blocks in a manner that is realistic, equitable and just, and allows them to achieve a quality of life and education agreeable to the benefit of the whole community. In providing such building blocks the elected government also has a moral obligation to include all stakeholders in its decision-making processes to ensure that its policies are effective and efficient in achieving society's common goal of an inclusive social condition (Frisch, 2000:7). In the case of higher education, this means a world-class system of research, teaching and learning which is of fundamental benefit to all, in keeping with contemporary Australian society, its needs and desires.

It can be argued that the Government is breaking its social contract to all those students and their communities who could attain and benefit from higher education from regional and lower socio-economic backgrounds if education is made so expensive that it becomes less accessible. In the event that physical campuses are not economically feasible, then dependable and efficient telecommunications facilities must be provided for those in regional and remote areas to allow access to study on line or by other external means. This aspect will be covered in more detail in chapter five in relation to facilitated learning centres in regional and rural areas. It will be argued that an already unequal rate of access will become more so unless

regional and rural areas are given “opportunities to enjoy the personal and economic benefits that education, particularly higher education, might confer,” and are assisted in the transition from old mining and agriculture based economies to the new knowledge-based economy (Isolated Children’s Parents Association (ICPA), 2002:5; Wenn, 2001:75). The provision of such services to regional populations is a social justice issue that needs to be addressed. Kalantzis argues:

... education will become more important not only to economic success, but to the preservation of social cohesion and democracy. ... educated individuals have higher employment rates, higher average weekly earnings, lower imprisonment rates and greater opportunities for continued re-skilling. That education is a public investment is a proposition we must accept if Australia is to embrace and thrive in the new economy (2001:3-5).

In this post-industrial world at least some form of post-compulsory education is now becoming a necessity. As Allport states (2001:2), “at least four out of ten new jobs will require a degree.” Those without qualifications will be doomed to low-income jobs and the gap between rich and poor will continue to expand. Without further education it will become increasingly difficult for workers to gain learning and expertise in new technologies and keep up with the changes in their worlds of work. This is not to say that higher education should be primarily oriented towards vocational training, though government funding policies which provide more funds for courses with more likely employment outcomes have moved higher education in this direction (Macintyre, 2002:10). Gigliotti (2000:1) argues that “it is important to remember that higher education [has] a responsibility to educate, not just ensure that

students are technologically capable and a good source of workers in a high-tech world.” It is now more important than ever that citizens have a well-rounded education, to have the opportunity to continue to learn throughout their lives to be able to think clearly, to solve problems, “to learn rapidly and develop constantly” (Alasoini, 2001:3). These are the skills that a more liberal education has given individuals in the past. It is imperative that this continues in our post-industrial service and information-oriented global environment, as the need for up to date knowledge becomes ever more crucial to the wellbeing of our society. According to the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), liberal education

... prepares us to live responsible, productive and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions,” (AACU, 1998).

I would argue that there is a danger to an increasingly complex society that does not provide adequate equitable and accessible education at all levels. Its social and economic well-being will be put at risk if higher education becomes too expensive for many people to undertake and it is the already underprivileged socio-economic groups such as ethnic minorities and rural and remote communities who will become further disadvantaged (Dionne *et al*, 1997:3). Funding for higher education in the future needs to have “particular reference to the special needs and circumstances of regional universities,” (Wollongong University Postgraduates Association (WUPA), 2002:2).

There have been many studies on the relationship between levels of education, health and socio-economic status. Results have shown that education is a major factor reducing poverty, raising income, health and quality of life. This is particularly so in regional areas where, traditionally, higher education participation has been much lower (Adler, 2002:2). In a modern knowledge society, it is even more urgent that adequate, accessible, affordable higher education is provided to regional communities. Failing to do so risks increasing socio-economic and health problems (Dionne *et al*, 1997:7). It would seem unwise for any government to risk a policy that would reduce higher education provision, so increasing the tax burden on all Australians if regional areas require greater funding to alleviate health and other low-income related problems. It is in the best interests of all modern governments, therefore, to uphold their social contract by providing at least adequate funding to health, welfare and education to guarantee stability and allow society to progress along with its neighbours and competitors. It will give society the skills and confidence to deal positively and effectively with the international and local anxieties that we all encounter.

Education is life-enhancing: it contributes to the whole quality of life.

This recognition of the purpose of higher education in the development of our people, our society, and our economy is central to our vision. In the next century, the economically successful nations will be those which become learning societies: where all are committed, through effective education and training, to lifelong learning (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997:Ch.1:1).

Universities are already in financial crisis. If, in future they are able to keep pace with increasing population trends and increasing numbers of students, there needs to be a reversal of the levelling out of real funding that has occurred over the past twenty-five years. Without this they will not be able to cope. The number of students in higher education is increasing in Australia despite the country's falling birthrate (Curtis, 2000:1-13). Nor will they be able to continue to provide quality teaching, learning and research without hugely increased tuition fees. Australia needs to spend more rather than less if it wants a quality higher education system and one that encourages mutual support rather than arbitrary competitiveness (University of Melbourne Postgraduates Association (UMPA), 2002:3-7). Also, increasing fees by 30% will diminish equity and "reduce education to a crude market in which the vast bulk of Australians from working and middle class families will be progressively excluded," (Despoja, 2003). According to Despoja, *Crossroads* emphasises control of higher education rather than providing a "high quality, accessible education for all Australians," (Despoja, 2003).

Australian society is becoming increasingly multifaceted and the rush to turn public institutions such as education into 'market-driven corporations' will not necessarily provide answers to the problems currently besetting its universities or their local communities. Changing market forces and management practices over the past two decades have seen some catastrophes where profit has become the primary objective. While there has to be a management of risk in a corporatised utility or service, often the level of risk is determined by the profit margin rather than the provision and management of excellent service. The energy crisis in Auckland, New Zealand some years ago (Wilkinson, 2003:1) is an example of a public service putting the community at risk and the recent failures in the insurance industry in

Australia bear witness to the costs to society when such services fail. It would be equally disastrous for Australia if similar calamities occurred in the rush to corporatise and privatise higher education, as the risks are even greater to its human capital and social justice. Its population would have less access to equitable higher education and knowledge in an era where that knowledge is becoming paramount. Governments and higher education governing bodies must acknowledge that, while market competition may improve the capital bases for some but not all universities, to totally rely on corporate practices will mean an all-encompassing change of focus for higher education. Universities are, like the society of which they are an important building block, highly complex organisations engaged in research, teaching and learning. If they become predominantly market- and profit-focussed then there is a risk that education for its own sake will be subjugated to education for vocations or for whatever increases the universities' financial capital.

### **Creating the 'enterprise' university**

Social contracts notwithstanding, however, the main factor driving the changes to enterprise higher education over the past two or three decades is the neoliberal position on fiscal policy and economic rationalism. *Crossroads* is part of a similar trend towards an 'enterprise' higher education in most Western countries but particularly in Australia, in the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Canada. Both in Australia and overseas over the period, monetarist activities have seen the reduction and/or privatisation of many former government institutions and the restructuring of others as corporations (Peters, 2001:59). There has been a corresponding reduction in real government social expenditure in many member countries including Australia, driven by such inter-government organisations as the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) and the World Bank (Browning,

2002:1). Regional areas have, in many instances, been the hardest hit with the closures of many regional offices of government departments, the closure of many bank branches and health services and the lack of reliable telecommunications services previously mentioned. Alcorn (2003:1) argues that “[t]he current Federal government has ... defined the provision of communication infrastructure as a private investment opportunity, rather than a basic investment in social provision for all.” There is little confidence in regional communities that, if Telstra is privatised, reliable telecommunications services will then be provided to them. Without this, the likelihood of dependable on-line delivery of distance education and computerised learning centres being available to them is uncertain.

Polanyi wrote in 1944 that: "to allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment...would result in the demolition of society" (George, 1999:1). Neoliberalism demands that the market must drive higher education as an enterprise and must construct a new culture, mistakenly accepting the Thatcher maxim that “there is no alternative,” (George, 1999:3). Neoliberalism promotes an “institutional culture in which ends are separated from means and where people are valued only for what they produce. [It] involves the importation into education of instrumentalist values, grounded on such motives as the self-interest of the individual” (Olssen et al, 2004:192). A higher education system that is coerced into becoming largely market-driven will disadvantage regional populations in Australia, and particularly in Western Australia with the greater distances between geographic centres, through their inability to sustain sufficient student numbers for resident campuses in any financially viable manner. If, as “Polanyi foresaw, the neoliberal intention that markets ... direct the fate of human beings [and] dictate its rules to society” (George, 1999:2), then society

and more particularly regional communities would be further diminished. Again quoting George (1999:6), “business and the market have their place, but this place cannot occupy the entire sphere of human existence.” As Clive Hamilton stated in his article ‘It’s learning, not commerce,’ (*The Australian*, 2/10/2002), “The application of market theory to universities is severely constrained by [the] nature of education as a commodity.” To describe it as such, is to greatly over-simplify higher education and its place in our society.

### **Exporting higher education and its consequences for regional WA**

Over the past few years Australia has internationalised much of its education system, particularly higher education. It is now the country’s third largest export industry (Stephen, 2003:2; [liberal.org.au](http://liberal.org.au), 2001), earning an estimated \$3.7 billion in the year 2000 (<http://www.liberal.org.au/policy/highered.pdf>, 2001:7) increasing to \$5 billion at the end of 2002 (Cook, 2003, Giesinger, 2002 and Nelson, 2002:MIN258). In the *Crossroads* Overview paper, chapter three begins with discussion about expanding opportunities in emerging global markets but social issues are only referred to in one paragraph (2002:13:59) before much more is added about labour markets and fiscal capacity. Higher education earns more than the wool industry and almost as much as wheat exports (Australia is now the world’s fifth or sixth largest exporter of education (Gilbert, 2001). Australia has currently around 280,000 international students, “twenty per cent of whom study Australian courses offshore” (DETYA, 2003) and Western Australia’ share of this market was eleven per cent in 2001 (Austrade, 2002). Many Australian universities now have offshore campuses and programmes of collaboration, both for research, teaching and learning overseas. Some examples of these include the University of Western Australia’s masters and doctorate of education programme in Hong Kong, Singapore and the

Philippines (<http://www.sce.hkbu.edu.hk/prgrmm/uwa-ded.htm>, 2003); Curtin University's Soft Soils Engineering Research Centre in Sarawak (<http://announce.curtin.edu.au/release2002/c8202.html>, 2003). As well, Edith Cowan University has formed strategic alliances in China, Indonesia, Norway and Ireland (<http://www.business.ecu.edu.au/profile/inc/index.htm>, 2003).

Internationalising education has many advantages in building further co-operation and understanding between nations and cultures. It also allows for increased mobility of students and academics for study and research. In a world that is increasingly uncertain due to terrorism, cross-border threats and other tensions and crises, increasing opportunities for Australians to study overseas and more international students to study in this country will, hopefully, build co-operation and understanding between cultures.

There may be a potential disadvantage in internationalising education, however, if policy-makers are blinded by export dollars. Overseas students are much more likely to study in the capital cities than in the regional areas. This may have a flow-on effect that funding for higher education is concentrated on the city campuses and the regions are left even further behind.

It is, as yet, unclear what consequence the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) will have on Australia's position in the international education export market. It may, in the main, be of enormous benefit to Australia's export of education services, but some of the reports are sobering at best. The World Trade Organisation has not yet agreed on such considerations as the "needs and rights of governments to regulate in order to pursue national policy objectives," (Sauvé, 2002:7). As proposed at the moment, "It severely limits the kinds of rules [this Australian] government can impose on companies which provide important services

[such as higher education], for example rules that protect the interests of society and the environment,” (People&Planet, 2000). In the long term, it may be that Australia has the ‘tiger by the tail’ if it is forced to take in education from elsewhere that is more aggressively marketed and competitive than its own. Unfortunately, higher education is now a marketable commodified enterprise and, as such, is then subject to GATS as a ‘commercial service.’ Nonetheless, I prefer the perspective of Fouilhoux (2002:6-7) that “Education is not a commodity” and of Nunn (2001) who argues that it is a “corollary of democracy.” If, by democracy we mean social equality, commodifying higher education is a backward step and puts participation by already disadvantaged groups such as regional populations at further risk of being left behind (Bradley. 1999:2). Gale and Densmore (2003:3) suggest that “the influence of the market in education has an anti-democratic agenda ... characterised by increased government control at the same time as reduced responsibility.” According to them, social justice requires higher education institutions and staff to “more fully engage with their communities in radical democratic ways” of challenging the neoliberal idea that this is the only way forward.

### **Subverting social justice - rhetoric, reality and the latest review**

How an individual or an organisation determines the rhetoric and the reality is often a matter of perception based on personal political convictions as well as on the social and economic stimuli in the community. This is certainly so for the responses to the recent *Crossroads* Review. Where the organisation or individual is situated in the community or higher education industry, as we are now encouraged to view it, determines whether their response is favourable to or critical of the changes proposed. Perhaps this is a condition of our post-modern world that because there seems to be no certainty and because of our right to question everything politicians

put forward, this has led us to doubt the validity of their rhetoric (Jary, 1991:375). Governments have become very adept at using the media and public relations to their advantage. Consequently, the rhetoric has often been designed to confuse many and alarm others, as in the quote from Mencken in 1923 (Hyde, 2003:238) at the beginning of this chapter. Australians have a reputation for being apathetic and cynical about their government but I also agree with Beddie (2003:1), that the “Socratean notion of education as citizen engagement” can change this. The *Crossroads* issues paper ‘*Varieties of Excellence: Diversity, Specialisation and Regional Engagement*’ (2002) raises this issue but it will be interesting to see how much emphasis it is given in reality in the future. In chapter four I argue that governments, higher education and industries can, and should, work together with regional centres to engage them in building and maintaining learning communities.

Political rhetoric is often couched in terms to confound the listener and reader into believing that its policies are ‘new and different’ or ‘improved.’ A case in point is the *Crossroads* rhetoric that the Government is providing 31,500 new university places (Nelson, 10/06/2003). The Labor Opposition reiterates that the Liberal Coalition are only providing 2,116 new places, but making up the numbers by converting the remainder from half funded to fully funded (Macklin, 23/05/2003). In my view, the Paper has largely been about rhetoric rather than reality and has not seriously addressed the need for reform or been straightforward about such issues as unmet demand for university places (Wheeler, 5/1/2003). In the *Crossroads* issues paper ‘*Varieties of Excellence: Diversity, Specialisation and Regional Engagement*’ (2002) the Government promised, “to stand by as a partner” to assist regional communities to “realise those plans” for “dealing with the challenges and opportunities confronting them.” Again though, the question is how much is rhetoric

and how much reality for the regions, particularly in Western Australia which a long way from Canberra?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, politicians tend not to “see what a university is for, [but to] think it is a damned costly luxury and would close [them all] down if not for the public outcry,” (Sir Walter Murdoch in Bolton, 2000:4). From this basis, it is difficult to see how any government can work from an altruistic and knowledgeable basis in order to produce a truly excellent higher education policy and practice unless they involve **all** of the relevant stakeholders. The Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, appointed a twenty-two-member reference group “to guide [him] through consideration of the complex issues facing Australian higher education. ... The reference group will draw on the disparate interests within the university and business sectors,” (Nelson, *Crossroads* Overview paper, 2002:vi). The main task of this group has been to consider the many submissions raised by the issues papers. In my view, however, it is inequitable that this reference group did not include representatives from all of the key stakeholders directly involved in higher education in Australia. For example neither university staff nor students, parents nor community members were invited to take part (UMPA Submission 204, 2002:47; NTEU, <http://www.nteu.org.au/news/890/3893> 26.4.2002). It is difficult to see how *Crossroads*, then, can have reached any balanced conclusions without including those people most directly involved in the higher education system. It leads to the suspicion that the Federal Government’s prime agenda, all along, has been to reduce spending on higher education with little real regard for the future quality of the system or how the system can even be improved at all without due consideration of all issues and all perspectives. As Bolton (2000:4) pointed out, “Politicians do not

want impartial and experienced sources of advice ... if their advice is insufficiently compliant.”

As mentioned earlier, it is obvious that education is essential to our modern society, not only from the many responses generated by the reviews and government papers in recent years, but also by the prominence given to it by both major political parties prior to the last federal election. Superficially at least, all of our political parties seem duly concerned with the standard of education in Australia though the rhetoric varies from party to party. Whether any of them are really determined to provide a socially just higher education system for all in the near future is arguable. It is more likely that the market will prevail, such that education will be purchased by those who can best afford it rather than it be a universal right provided by the state, at least as long as the current fiscal policies remain in place. As Alcorn (2003:1) argues, “The reality of social justice, the fair go of Australian folklore, may be disappearing.” It is unfortunate that government rhetoric and budgets of the past few years have been inclined to be overly concerned with decrying the dollars going out of the public purse and less interested in letting the public know just how many more dollars are being returned to it through taxation, earned exports or other benefits of increased economic and knowledge capital accrued to Australian society. Politicians, especially when debating cost cutting and using ‘buzzwords’ such as innovation, diversification, productivity and accountability, often repeat the budget costs in dollar terms to our society but fail to mention the financial revenues and other benefits which are returned to it, as mentioned earlier.

## **Disinvesting in higher education public investment in the future, not public expenditure**

As Mary Kalantzis (2001:5) has argued, governments need a change in attitude from the cynical view that education is about public cost to one which accepts that education is a public investment. Although there is obviously a cost to conduct and verify research and acquire knowledge, “Unlike capital and labour, knowledge strives to be a public good, or what economists call ‘non-rivalrous,’[meaning that] once knowledge is discovered and made public, there is zero marginal cost in sharing it with more users,” (World Bank 1999 Report at New Zealand Ministry of Economic Development (NZMED), 2001:2). Adam Smith defined “education as a human necessity” (Bolton, 2000:1) but with lower and ever lower government budget priorities for higher education and higher and higher fees, it risks becoming a luxury for Australia’s elite. It is not surprising therefore that over the past few years stakeholders have become somewhat cynical and uneasy, if not actually alarmed, about political rhetoric compared with the reality.

The reality is that, if *Crossroads* as it stands has been ratified in Parliament, so that now universities have increased flexibility in setting their own fees beyond the 30% cap from 2005 onwards. Murdoch is one university which has already moved in this direction when “*the Senate resolve[d] to support the introduction of [up front] fees*” (Bradley, [pres@guild.murdoch.edu.au](mailto:pres@guild.murdoch.edu.au), 7 October 2003). It is difficult to see, however, how this will “enable universities to attract the best students” (*Crossroads*, 2002:37, para. 182) if students are selected according to their, or their parents’ ability to pay rather than on merit. The ‘best’ students (that is those with the highest academic qualifications or the most mature attitude to study) may sometimes be those from regional Australia, or from other lower socio-economic

community groups. These students may be unable to meet the increased costs of higher education in the future. This is particularly so for courses such as dentistry, medicine and law where the proposed student loans of \$50,000 are likely to be well below the anticipated cost of \$100,000. There are also the added residential and travel costs to regional students of relocation to study centres as these courses are only delivered in “major” (see metropolitan) campuses. Whatever the outcome of the parliamentary debate in the near future, students will all definitely have to pay more for their higher education than before (Bowden, 2003:3), whether city, regional, domestic or overseas, full or part time students.

The rhetoric of *Crossroads* waxed lyrical about providing Australia with a quality (world class) higher education system yet then discussed ‘no frills’ service, cost discounts and other price differentiation. If higher education is pared down to a basic minimum where all non-essential items are discarded, it is difficult to see how it can then be a ‘world class’ system. It may very well provide diversification but how will it guarantee “strong quality assurance and consumer protection mechanisms” (*Crossroads*, 4.183, 2002:37) that are equitable across all Australian universities regardless of whether they are in the Group of Eight, are wealthy long-established, newer ‘red brick’ or smaller regional institutions? The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was set up in 2000 and is working towards a national accreditation system for higher education similar to that governing technical, commercial and other further education colleges in Australia and New Zealand. It is expected that it will guarantee uniformity of standards across all Australian universities and campuses. The *Crossroads* Review seeks to deregulate (Manne, 19 May 2003:2) and commodify higher education, however, and there is no proof that deregulation necessarily leads to improved quality in education or other

industries or services. In this instance, it is very likely that it will “exert undue financial pressure on students in respect of tuition and other ancillary fees” (Finney *et al*, 2002:4-6). Various Government policies of the past twenty-five years have lead to “downsizing or rationalising ... [with] an emphasis on productivity, efficiency and cost control, rather than quality, diversity and investment”(WUPA, 2002:2). As Schreuder (2000:3) argues:

The awful and ignored reality is that Australia has been progressively slipping down the scale compared with other advanced nations investing strongly in higher education, research and development. In the latter half of the last decade, many governments – notably in the USA, Asia, the UK and Europe – have strongly recognised the importance of research as essential for economic development.

The “plurality of financing approaches” (*Crossroads* Overview paper, 2002:38) is hardly likely to achieve any more than muddying the waters and confusing the issue. This will serve to make it even more difficult for smaller, less affluent – and usually regional – universities to find their way through the maze (*Crossroads*, 2002:38). The proposed fee deregulation has been the most ‘talked about’ section of *Crossroads*, probably because it is the single most crucial part of the whole Review and the most influenced by the neoliberal premises on which it has all been predicated. It is also, consequently, the component which will make the greatest impact on higher education for the foreseeable future, and again more particularly on regional students who have other expenses with which to contend (Allan, 2002:1). Fee deregulation (*Crossroads*, 2002:37) will most benefit those universities that are considered ‘prestigious’ and which, usually metropolitan, also

typically have a large resident population from which to draw their student body. The Review does not seem overly concerned that this will stratify the higher education system even further allowing for degrees from some institutions being considered to be of greater or lesser value in Australia and overseas. The students at those less well off universities may be just as meritorious and have worked just as long and hard as those in the Group of Eight institutions. As mentioned earlier, some of the smaller regional universities have produced world-class teaching and research programmes that are excellent and equal to anything available elsewhere in Australia, for example the marine biology programme at James Cook University in Townsville, Queensland.

### **The responses to the papers –the main criticisms and concerns**

The stance of each of the responses depends largely on the position and the situation of the respondent. Those in more privileged financial situations, such as the Group of Eight universities, are more in favour of the new package than is the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), for example. To some it would seem that, rather than “Backing Australia’s Future,” the current Government is backing out of higher education.

One recurring theme in the responses to *Crossroads* is that deregulation of fees and the introduction of a tiered system will, in practice, mean that the “quality of your education would be based on your ability to pay,” (Bowden, 2003:2). As previously mentioned, this will further disadvantage regional and rural students who will have the added expense of accommodation and travel. It will reduce their ability to access higher education where those fees become too high. If a voucher system is also introduced by Parliament as a result of the Review, then smaller, newer

(particularly regional) institutions will also be disadvantaged through their smaller student numbers (Davis, C, 2002:2; Flinders University submission, 2002:1-5).

It has been said that Australia does not have a university in the world's top one hundred (Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC) News, 11/04/2002:3). Most criteria for judging the world's top universities include income rather than excellence in teaching, learning and research (SUPA, 2002:3). Any scale or judgment of Australia's universities in any 'top one hundred' is, at best, arbitrary. Whose top one hundred? On what are they judged? Is it important any way and to whom? Who will benefit other than those in already-privileged universities with high status both within Australia and overseas? If Australia's future higher education system is based on this mythical one hundred, it may provide prestige and kudos for some of the staff and students in those 'top' universities but it is difficult to see how this will provide social equity for the rest of Australia or whether it is really important nationally or globally. If the Government is serious about improving the whole higher education system then surely 'worth' relates to the teaching, learning and research rather than that institution's position on that questionable scale (UMPA, Submission 204, 2002:3-7, 47). The Chair of the Group of Eight Universities congratulated Nelson on the higher education reform package but there is little confidence from other university groups that the changes will be as good for them or their students or their local communities (<http://www.go8.edu.au/>). If governments are serious about wanting any of Australia's universities in the top one hundred, and if the criteria must include income, then surely they must manifestly increase their funding to the system rather than continue to erode it.

Raising the international standing of some institutions will inevitably advantage the wealthier universities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Western Australia

and other Group of Eight members while newer or less well-endowed institutions will then be likely to attract fewer fee-paying students. The proposed scheme would seem to suggest a tiered system similar to that in the United States and move away from Australia's ideals of equity, preferring instead to return to an elitist format where only the wealthy can afford to attend the wealthy universities (Manne, 2002:3 and Morris, 9/7/2003:2). The *Crossroads* Review papers envisage a system where "up-front fee barriers are removed for all Australian students," yet somehow "preserving essential equity of access and expanding opportunities for [all Australian students] to participate in higher education" (Go8, 28.6.2002). If such barriers are removed, then as previously argued, this will place a university education beyond the capacity of many more Australian students.

### **Residualising regional provision**

Australia is a demographically diverse country. With the exception of the national capital, Canberra, all State capitals are situated on the coast and almost seventy per cent of the population (ABS, 2003) is based in those cities. There are some large regional inland centres that do have established resident universities, such as Armidale and Orange in New South Wales and Bendigo and Geelong in Victoria. In Western Australia there are no full-scale universities outside of Perth, only 'regional campuses.' These are, in effect, branch campuses of one, or a combination of, metropolitan universities. The School of Mines in Kalgoorlie was originally a 'stand alone' tertiary institution but has since been incorporated into Curtin University as part of its regional campus there.

Most rural and regional population centres in Western Australia are too small to support a large resident campus. It is important to remember, however, that even the smaller rural and remote communities also have need of higher education and the

current Federal government has addressed these in *Crossroads* as a separate issue: diversity, specialisation and regional engagement. The implications for Western Australia, particularly where population centres are often smaller and more remote than in other States, are that decreased levels of funding will be more acute.

While rural and regional populations in Western Australia declined during the industrial and post-industrial nineteenth and twentieth centuries this trend is reversing as many people search for an alternative to city life. Future planning for regional higher education may have to take into consideration the sea-change in social movements where some regional centres are experiencing an increase in population (Kling, 1995:1-10 and KPMG, 26/07/2005). Examples of this in Western Australia are Busselton, Albany and Margaret River. This movement by many people away from larger cities is indicative of a restless dissatisfaction with post-industrial cities, a search for a ‘better way of life’ and a “greater sense of community” for many families (Hoy, 2003:1).

While it is clearly not economically feasible to provide residential university campuses for all regional areas, some form of higher education access is imperative. Smaller campuses combining university and TAFE colleges are established in some of the larger country areas and are discussed in the following chapter on regional higher education in Western Australia. In areas too small even for such combined sites as these, perhaps facilitated learning communities may be an economically feasible alternative and these will also be discussed later in this work.

## **Summary and conclusions**

It would seem that the present Government is willing to see a privileged hierarchical Oxbridge/Ivy League system that harks back to the eighteenth century

and before, when only the very rich or politically privileged students had any chance of gaining entry to universities (Manne, 19/5/2003:2). It will create a stratified system and be in direct opposition to the Australian belief in a 'fair go' for all (Alcorn, 2003). It is an anachronism in the twenty-first century and one that we have as a society surely, hopefully, outgrown. The group of eight universities, already in a privileged situation funding-wise, generally support the proposed new system but it will in reality advantage only a very few of the nation's students for the foreseeable future. While the so-called elitist Oxbridge/Ivy League universities in the United Kingdom and the United States are working hard at widening access to students and modernising their attitudes, it seems our current government would have our universities go in the opposite direction (Manne, 19/5/2003:2). This at a time when our country's expenditure on higher education has fallen from 1.7% of GDP to 1.4% in nine years while other countries are increasing theirs (NTEU, 1/10/2002:1). Since 1996 the current Federal Government has reduced spending on higher education by \$5 billion and increased HECS fees by 110% (Deakin, 2002:2). The Australian Labor Party has always held education to be an important part of its platform yet they too have reduced funding to higher education in the recent past. The question is, would a future Federal Labor Government seek to redress this situation in light of their criticisms of the Nelson Review (Macklin, 20/12/2004)?

Not surprisingly, most of the remaining thirty-one universities, comprising 80% of Australia's higher education, do not support transforming the tertiary education system to a tiered system such as those described above in the United Kingdom and the United States. This will definitely impact on their students wishing to go on to further study and research overseas as their alumni will not be as well known or regarded internationally. The system will in all likelihood become

stratified into ‘prestige’ universities with expensive fees and well-funded research while the remainder will be compelled to become ‘employee factories’ more interested in churning out job-ready graduates, as undertaking quality research will be beyond their affordable capacity (Power *et al*, 08/03/05).

The latest tinkering with the higher education system is supposedly to search for diversity and quality but in real terms it is about money – the government wants to spend less. However the universities need more. It is almost certain that there will be higher fees but this will not necessarily guarantee higher quality. It may well just guarantee the stratification of institutions, the threat of price wars and different levels of ‘worthiness’ of degrees from different institutions. This will hardly lead to a better or more equitable higher education system for Australia in the next few years.

If the ‘top’ universities are allowed to set their own fees it is in their best interest financially to ensure they will be as high as the market will bear, as evident in other corporate industries. Other institutions will follow suit by increasing their own fees. Slowly the cost to students of achieving higher education will rise to a point beyond the capacity of more and more Australians.

According to neoliberal governments, it would seem equity is only for those who can afford it. This bodes ill for the economic and social future of Australia and sounds the death knell for the ‘clever country’. Students will, increasingly, be forced to work to support themselves while studying, putting enormous time and lifestyle pressures on them. In many cases, this will not only affect the quality of their work but will also determine whether they can afford to complete their degrees or can cope with the imposition of increased workloads upon them. It would seem that many of our politicians have accepted the neoliberal ‘buzzwords’ and ideology. It tends to suggest they are out of touch with the realities of the new knowledge-based economy

and the current and future education needs of our society. In a world where, according to the World Bank Report of 1998/1999, “knowledge has become perhaps the most important factor determining the standard of living – more than land, than tools, than labour.”

Having put time and effort into a nationally accredited system to standardise secondary and vocational education and training, the federal government now seems to be moving away from extending this system to the tertiary level and towards a new elitism with a view to earning export dollars rather than providing a quality assured system equitable and accessible to all Australians. A system whereby only one or two of the nation’s universities are in the world’s top one hundred stratifies the degree system into top degrees, good degrees or just plain ordinary. Not a good move for a society that considers itself class-free, where everyone is considered equal and believes in a ‘fair go’ (Acorn, 2003). Funding options for students are becoming more complex but less realistic. Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) debts and other student loans can, and often will, become stones around the necks of graduates, particularly for women graduates who take maternity leave during their working lives, or for other family members with mortgage and other commitments to contend with (WUPA, 16/5/2003).

Education is a very controversial issue and emotions about policy tend to run high. It is often difficult to separate the issues involved and to make sense of what is rhetoric and what is reality given that each protagonist has his, her or their own agenda and point of view. Mencken’s hobgoblins and *Crossroads* have not made the labyrinth any easier for many of us to find a way through, nor made the ‘industry’ any ‘safer’ or more comfortable for its staff, students or local communities.

This will inevitably place an even greater burden on students from regional areas, particularly those in Western Australia where the distances between the larger cities and campuses is even greater than in other States. Not all subjects are suitable for on-line or distance education so this can limit the career choices for regional students as does the sparsity of telecommunications. Recent Telstra and Government reports stated that eight per cent of the landmass of Western Australian is serviced by mobile phones. The report also stated that only three per cent of Australians across the country are without mobile and/or satellite phone coverage (Grebe, 2001). In 2006, the situation has not significantly changed and mobile phone services are only possible in Perth, the larger regional centres and some sections of major arterial roads in this State. Satellite phone services, where they are available, are still prohibitively expensive for most students to use. I travelled widely and often across most of this State and elsewhere in Australia in 2005 and can corroborate the experiences of other travellers and regional residents. Even in areas as close as one hundred kilometres from Perth, the service is either non-existent, is not readily available, reliable or properly maintained. The expense of satellite telephones is still beyond the reach of all but corporate users (Walker, 2003; Siekierka, 2003). According to these same reports, digital telephone service is not available to those outside the built up areas already mentioned, and the 'drop out rate' of normal land line services makes on-line methods of distance education very difficult for rural and remote users. The Reports also state that access to mobile and digital services is unlikely to change in Western Australia for the foreseeable future due to the high costs of providing them to small population centres.

In summary, I contend that *Crossroads* will have a detrimental effect on higher education in Australia, and more particularly, on regional students. The added

costs will increase their financial burden and will deter some students from choosing to undertake tertiary studies. Bradley argues that “when operating in a knowledge economy one’s level of education becomes a critical currency. Where this currency is more easily acquired and spent by some groups and denied others, then governments are retreating from their responsibility for the public good” (1999:8). Unless steps are taken to remedy this situation, the regional communities in Australia will suffer the consequences of losing ground in the knowledge economy. The following chapter provides an in-depth study of higher education in regional areas of Western Australia; its importance in their progress and the need for good government policies to assist in their further development.

## *Chapter four – higher education and its impact on regional development*

This chapter is designed to give an overview of higher education in regional Western Australia as it is now. University branch campuses have only recently been established outside the metropolitan area though each of the State's five universities now has tied campuses or learning centres scattered throughout the State. The aforesaid School of Mines in Kalgoorlie opened in 1902 as an autonomous institution in its own right, as did the Muresk Agricultural College in Northam, but both have since been integrated into Curtin University of Technology. There are no separate 'stand alone' universities in Western Australia outside of Perth, as is the University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales and the University of Ballarat in Victoria. This is mainly due to the smaller and more widespread population in this State and that its regional cities remained quite small until the 1980s. Although centres such as Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie have since grown and each now has a population above 35,000 they still have only 'regional campuses' of metropolitan higher education institutions. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

In this chapter I argue for widening access to higher education for the regional, rural and remote populations of the State and its importance to the future development of non-metropolitan areas. These issues are discussed in the following sub-sections:

1. Why regional education?
2. Neoliberalism, viability of the regional university and its community

3. The national perspective at the expense of the regional
4. Collegiality, community and regional students
5. Student mobility
6. That first year on campus for regional students
7. Establishing needs
8. Engaging regions, universities and participation
9. Summary, conclusions and the future

### **Why regional education?**

In his paper on the post-modern condition, Kumar argues that “political, economic and cultural life is now strongly influenced by developments at the global level” (1997:98). He also argues that an unexpected effect of this is “the renewed importance of the local, and a tendency to stimulate sub-national and regional cultures” (1997:98). It is expected that, in the knowledge economy of the present time, the regions will become more important to the future development of Australia (OECD, 1999, 2001). It is argued here that higher education can be a very positive instrument in assisting the regions to achieve levels of social, political and economic benefits they might otherwise struggle to gain.

In the past few decades, higher education has had to adapt to the forces of internationalisation and knowledge-centred world economies. It is now also facing a challenge from regional areas that are demanding greater accessibility to higher education and to the benefits they expect will flow on to their communities and cultures. Regions that do not have local higher education facilities will face severe restrictions on their ability to be sustainable in the future. They will also face

difficulties in their ability to attract investment and development projects due to a lack of suitably skilled and qualified people (Jefferies, 1997:3).

As governments have a social contract to provide equitable education for all citizens, so universities also have a social responsibility to the communities “in which they are embedded” (WCHE, 1998:IV, 12). This is perhaps particularly so for universities established in regional areas where local partnerships will not only increase the success of the higher education institution itself, but will also increase levels of success for the regional centres and their communities, the local industries and organisations. Globalisation has affected rural markets and communities at least as much as those in the metropolitan and industrialised areas of Australia but it would be over-simplifying the issue to say this is the only reason for continuing rural decline (Alston, 2002:2 and Alston, 1999:1).

In Australia as elsewhere, the past thirty years have seen major changes away from highly regulated structures of capitalism and mass production (the decline of Fordism) and towards a system which has, simultaneously, seen the growth of globalisation and regionalisation (OECD, 1999:18). This is a major driving factor towards widening the scope of and access to regional higher education. In Australia, the Federal Government is the major controlling and funding body of higher education and has viewed the system from a predominantly national point of view. However, it must now recognise that as globalisation is bringing regional areas to the fore those regions need a greater say in their own administration and production. The nation cannot afford a higher education system where only those who live in the major cities or who can afford it can have it. Nor can it afford to deprive its regions of affordable access to a high quality higher education that is responsive to all of its stakeholders. It must recognise that the regions “in effect become learning regions,”

(Florida, 1995 in OECD, 1999:19). Not to do so would severely restrict not only the future of the regions, but the nation's ability to progress and its competitiveness internationally.

Regional universities contribute to local development not only by providing teaching, research, consultation and direction but by providing “targeted ‘just in time’ (learning as you need it) skill-building to meet the needs of [local] business and organisations to enable them to become more export oriented product producers and competitive in the global economy” (Garlick, 1998:31, 69). A Whyalla, South Australia campus study found that it contributes five times its revenue value to its embedded region (Cooper, undated). The University of New England, New South Wales has estimated its contribution to its regional economy was in the order of \$236 million; overall the national contribution calculated to be in the vicinity of two billion dollars (SCPIRS, 2000:275). The increase in the number of regional graduates who then remain in their home regions also contribute to the level of management and other expertise required to foster innovation, entrepreneurship and investment in the region (Garlick, 1998:35). It is easy to see that the stimulus to regional economies provided by higher education is considerably greater than its cost to the national and state treasuries. I would argue that little regard is given to these statistics, in general, because government policies are invariably made in Canberra and the capital cities, where there is often little real knowledge, understanding or concern for regional communities.

Regional higher education institutions and learning centres will have the capacity to respond to, co-operate with and build on both “traded linkages ... [and] untraded interdependencies,” localised expertise and cultures (Storper, 1997:43; Garlick, 2000, 23). They will be in a prime position to provide generalised as well as

specialised targeted higher and continuing education and consultant expertise to their communities (WCHE, 1998:IV, 12). Alston (2002:1) claims that “Australia’s progress as a nation depends on its ability [and its willingness] to support its rural and regional communities ...there are human capital and economic issues at stake.”

Population densities have changed radically in Australia over the past three decades, especially in inland towns and rural centres, as people have drifted to cities, whether to capital cities or to regional cities such as Bunbury in the South West and Albany in the Great Southern Region in Western Australia. The population drift away from many small rural communities in Western Australia has been caused in the main by changes to agricultural practices and to mining activities as markets ebb and flow (DLGRD, 2003:31). In contrast, some country centres across Australia, particularly coastal towns and smaller cities, are experiencing an increase in population (KPMG, 26/07/2005; Boast *et al*, undated:1). This is in part due to a sea change, where workers and their families are choosing to leave the larger cities for what they see as a ‘better lifestyle’ and new opportunities in the regional areas (Kling, 1995:1-10; Hoy, 2003:1). These changes to our society have raised the need for regional higher education institutions and local, state and federal governments to reconsider their commitment to regional centres especially, with regard to globalisation and future economic growth (WCHE, 1998:IV-12).

Rural and remote participation in higher education is only 20.6 per cent compared with 26.6 per cent in metropolitan areas (DEST, 2001). Murphy and McLean (2002) found that while access to, and equity in, higher education had improved for most population groups in the past decade, this was not so for students from rural and remote backgrounds. This would suggest that higher education is an issue that deserves greater attention by all levels of government if it is not to

adversely affect the future development of the regions and the nation. Less than 30 per cent of Australia's population lives outside the metropolitan areas. Of these, 4.5 per cent are classified as living remote from any capital city (DLGRD, 2003:18; James *et al*, 1999). Figures indicate that external study is still the most common form of enrolment of higher education students in regional Western Australia. This is particularly so for the Kimberley and the Pilbara (DLGRD, 2003:104), even though higher and further education campuses have been established there for some years. This is mainly because they are the most distant regions from Perth and have the smallest resident populations. Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing figures for 2001 (ABS, 2001) give the proportion of professionally qualified people in the Perth Metropolitan Region as 32 per cent (eight per cent higher than for the regional areas of the State). It was not possible to determine whether figures were available which showed any relationship between regional centres with higher education facilities and the numbers of professionally qualified people living in them.

In Australia generally, McInnis' study (1995:22) found that there is less ethnic diversity in regional areas where "84 per cent of students were Australian-born and only 13 per cent spoke a language other than English at home." In Western Australia, this average may differ slightly; for example, the Kimberley Region has an indigenous population of 47 per cent, for many of whom English would be their second language (DLGRD, 2003:29). The varied cultural and ethnic make up of the Kimberley is in part due to the pearling industry and includes Indigenous, European, Chinese, Japanese and Malay. The number of Indigenous students in higher education has been increasing slowly over the past few years but still amounts to only 1.2 per cent of domestic students in Western Australia in 2002. Yet the State's

Indigenous population is 3.5 per cent of the total (DLGRD, 2003:27 and DEST, 2002:11). The Broome campus of Notre Dame University is providing targeted courses for Indigenous students, for example post-graduate certificate in Aboriginal Studies and Certificate III in Theatre (Aboriginal) (<http://www.nd.edu.au/broome>).

Participation in higher education in rural and isolated populations continues to be less than that of metropolitan areas (Clift, 1997:2). Establishment of regional campuses has been shown to reverse this trend in their embedded communities, though as yet only at a slow pace. Regional campuses that provide teaching and learning programmes relevant to their local students will increase that level of participation and retention in their local areas. Research has also shown that those students, when they graduate, are more likely to remain locally, thereby increasing the knowledge and social capital of their area (Macdonald, 2005:1). ). It has been shown that programmes designed to give rural and remote secondary students a better understanding of university life and study has increased their participation and retention rates (Rhoden, 2002:4).

Those university campuses already established in the larger regional centres in Western Australia have attempted to address the issue of participation by engaging their embedded local communities through marketing and delivering, wherever possible, programmes which are important to local communities. The increase in the number of students able to study locally who may not otherwise have been able to do so, has in turn not only increased their employment and lifestyle choices but also contributed to the economic development of those regions. In turn the university, its staff and students contribute to the economic growth of their local embedded community through more employment, increased spending on living costs and through providing expert knowledge and support (DEST, 2001:1; Bradley, 1999:4

Regional higher education campuses and learning centres have the capacity to improve access and equity for those students who have the aptitude to undertake university studies but who are disadvantaged by their distance from metropolitan centres. School leavers who have the option to stay at home in their own communities find the transition to university life is often less stressful for them and for their families (McInnis, 1995:29). For regional students studying close to their own familiar environments this is a distinct advantage, added to the collegiality they gain from being with the other students. Smaller regional campuses can provide their students with a greater opportunity for personal interaction and supervision in smaller groups (Orr, 2002:10). This may then also afford a more seamless transition to study in the larger campuses in the city for those students unable to complete their full degree courses at their own regional centres (Orr, 2002:11).

There are deeply-held beliefs in many rural communities that the establishment of a higher education campus would be a channel through which their economic and social development would be enhanced. Research has shown this to be so and is one of the reasons such centres of learning have been created, often through partnerships between local government bodies, local industries and other groups (Orr, 2002:5; Goulter, 2002:3; Paterson, 2001:141). Both the Rockingham and Albany campuses share their libraries with their local communities as illustrations of universities and local councils working together for their mutual benefit.

The establishment of more regional higher education campuses or learning centres will encourage all those communities to take an active role in the management not only of their own lives and regions but also in the wider international sphere and in the increasingly networked society and economy. They “deserve to be given the same rights of citizenship as urban Australians and the same

access to education and training to improve their situation” (Alston, 1999:2). Again quoting Alston (1999:2):

Australia is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (both concluded in 1966) which note that all have the right to access services and systems which enhance not only civil and political rights, but also economic and material well-being.

Quite apart from the perspectives of equity and accessibility, it is important to encourage the regions to take an active and positive role in their own development and autonomy that bring benefits to their communities. The regions can no longer depend entirely on their capital city centres of government for the provision of regionally relevant education, health and welfare. This is because there is often little understanding in the city of the special conditions which rural populations experience and of their special needs. “Strategies and measures cannot simply be imposed from Canberra or State capitals [but] need to be “local, targeted, and community-owned and led” (Alston, 1999:7). Education is “centralised and framed around an urbocentric model of conceptualisation and delivery [from which] rural and isolated areas will continue to suffer” unless these issues are addressed adequately (Alston, 1999:7). Setting up regional higher education campuses will address the issue of educational equity and access. It will also address other local issues by providing skilled and experienced local personnel from which the community can draw to achieve local autonomy. It also increases the community’s social, economic and knowledge capital (Paterson, 2001:133).

Regional campuses make an important contribution to the human capital of their embedded communities through what is termed the ‘third role.’ This is achieved by providing regionally-focussed teaching and research programmes and “liberal adult education and evening classes and access to facilities like libraries, theatres, museums and public lectures” (OECD, 1999:93 and Gunasekara, 2004:2). They also provide leadership. It is this ‘third role’ that not only assists the regional higher education campus to engage with its embedded society, but also provides a wider access to its community members.

From the broader perspective, the greatest advantages to the regions are both social and economical. For example, as their local higher education centres become more established, well known, and accepted and they develop into an integral part of their communities, there has been shown to be an encouraging increase in the intake of school leavers (Orr, 2002:18). It has the follow-on benefit of improving the overall levels of education and knowledge capital in those regions (Harrington, 1998:1). This contributes to increases in the social and economic capital as more professionally qualified people stay in the area after graduation as well as those directly employed by the campus (Goulter, 2002:3 and Paterson, 2001:141). Regional higher education centres also have both a direct and an indirect impact on the students’ opportunities for employment within the region (OECD, 1999). A benefit also ensues from regional higher education institutions as a stakeholder and active participant in building local, regional, national and international connections within and between their communities and elsewhere (Garlick, 2000:16). This multiplier effect is created by regional higher education campuses whereby they contribute to their embedded communities through direct local sourcing of goods and services and through the effects of staff and student spending in the area (NCIHE,

1997, Chapter 12). This not only provides for employment in the region but can also reverse the population drift away from the area. It has a positive effect in reversing the drift of school leavers to the city if they are able to access tertiary studies locally. Regional universities and campuses have a positive impact on and are often a catalyst for change in the “social, political, economic and cultural life” of their neighbouring communities (Paterson, 2001:141). They are also ideally situated to respond to the uniqueness of the social, cultural and physical characteristics of their embedded communities more appropriately than is often the case from an overall national or state analysis (Garlick in Cumpston *et al*, 2001). This is especially important, considering one fifth of students in Australia attend regional campuses, which in turn account for one third of the higher education system. Regional campuses, in this document, as in *Crossroads*, are defined as those outside of capital cities in Australia (*Crossroads*, 2002:23).

### **Neoliberalism, viability of the regional university and its community**

In *Crossroads* (2002:30) and as discussed in the previous chapter, it was stated that “universities need to recognise that they too are businesses.” This seems to place a great emphasis on universities making a profit and less on their prime function as a place where one accumulates knowledge through research and disseminates it through teaching. Given that as already stated, universities already return far greater profits, both quantifiable and immeasurable, to their communities than they cost in dollar terms, surely it is neither realistic nor necessary for them to totally lose their identity as teaching, learning and research institutions. Like Bourdieu, I believe that, in driving higher education towards a ‘pure market’ system, neoliberalism attempts through deregulation to dismantle those of its “collective

structures” capable of opposition. Ultimately this will destroy the state’s social capital at great cost to its society (Bourdieu in *Le Monde*, December 1988).

Without government intervention, regional universities, whether stand-alone or outpost campuses, and regardless of the extent of their partnerships with local industries and organisations, will be unable to compete in such an environment. Their student numbers are likely always to remain too small to attract sufficient public and private funding or to compete, either for places or viability, against the larger teaching institutions whether in Australia or elsewhere. Therefore, the monetarist policies espoused by the neoliberal governments of recent years and the *Crossroads* Paper will impact most unfavourably both on regional populations and on their education (Bowden, 2003:1-5; Vagg, 2002:1-7).

Australia’s implementation of the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) will mean that, as businesses, universities will have to compete globally unless they have a very specialised programme which is not delivered elsewhere. They must be careful to recognise and weigh the value of their special role in the complex social, environmental and economic development of their embedded regions against placing a priority on national and borderless global competition (Garlick, 1998:17; *Crossroads*, 2002:13). Regional campuses have an opportunity to promote themselves and their embedded communities across wider national and international networks for the benefit of all concerned. The neoliberal proposals will severely disadvantage regional students where higher education in some form is not available to them, particularly those who are in low socio-economic areas (Vagg, 2002:6).

## **The national perspective at the expense of the regional**

Regional higher education has become an important political and social issue in many countries over the past two decades witnessed by the wealth of published literature from the United Kingdom, the United States, Brazil, France and other European countries. There are familiar themes of enquiry into equity, access and regional social and economic development in many countries. There have been many conferences held and studies carried out internationally in recent years on the importance of regional higher education as a means of linking and developing neighbouring nations and regions to create harmony, understanding and co-operation between cultures (IOHE, 2001; EAIR, 2004).

The rhetoric of the *Crossroads* issues paper, *Varieties of Excellence: Diversity, Specialisation and Regional Engagement*, while ostensibly emphasising the importance of ‘regional Australia,’ has failed to seriously address the issue and is still looking at it from a ‘metro-centric’ and predominantly ‘national,’ that is, Canberra perspective (Goulter, 2002:1). It decries the ‘significant replication’ in the higher education sector yet seems not to understand that in a country as diverse (and with population centres as far-flung as they are in Australia) there must of necessity be a high degree of replication (Nelson, 2002:v, 9). It is neither desirable nor practicable for universities to be so diverse that students (particularly in the case of postgraduates who are likely to be already established in employment) are expected to move to some other location or State to study. In the case of smaller regional institutions that need to cater to local school leavers, there will always be a proliferation of some ‘foundation,’ courses as well as locally appropriate and specialised teaching and research. It would also be inequitable for rural students if their regional university only delivered a “narrow breadth of study options of direct

relevance to the regional economy” (Council of Australian Postgraduates Associations, 2002:4,109). While remaining alert to their changing international and national contexts, regional universities have a special role to play in engaging their adjacent communities and working together with them to enhance their local regions.

The issues paper also emphasises competition in the same sentence as collaboration and discusses rationalisation at the same time as diversification. It is no wonder that the higher education system is confused and alarmed at these often-conflicting notions put forward by a government that seems to be driving it inexorably towards an entirely market-driven corporate framework for higher education. It is unlikely that any ‘national vision’ driven by Canberra will be sufficiently cognisant of and responsive to regional needs. Competition between regions and regional institutions is counter-productive to providing the ‘varieties of excellence’ that those regional communities need. What regional development does take place is too often the result of changes in governments, particularly in ‘marginal’ electorates. This ignores the fact that “national objectives can only be achieved by realising the full potential of constituent sub-national units” (OECD, 1999:9). Funding models must take into account the specific needs of individual regional communities and institutions for innovative and specially targeted programmes when balancing the “band of risk” against viability (Gilbert, 2002:1 and Winchester *et al*, undated).

### **Collegiality, community and regional students**

Although students in regional campuses have at times expressed a sense of ‘not belonging’ to their main campuses, there is a sense of nearness with other students and their tutors provided through the social contact in such a small environment. External and distance students who do not, or only rarely, have the

opportunity to be on campus more commonly feel this sense of being set apart from university life. These feelings of separateness can affect the quality of students' academic life and their results, but do not necessarily reflect their academic ability (Deakin, 2002:13). The interaction between campus, lecturers and groups of student helps to give students a better understanding of what is expected of them and a significant advantage over a distance or external mode of study (Orr, 2002:24). The *Crossroads Overview* paper (2002:19, Section 95) proposal that 'individualised learning' would benefit students is not borne out by some of the response submissions. Nor is it the experience of external students who miss out on the "sense of intellectual community that attendance at a physical campus gives them, whether in the city or in regional centres" (Deakin, 2002:12; UTS SA, 2002:6). Individualised learning, and particularly online and distance learning, can in susceptible students lead to surface rather than deep learning (Bradford, 2001:1; Creese, 2002:1-9). On-line and distance learning do not suit all learning styles as there are often cultural as well as attitudinal barriers which inhibit students' success (Berge, 1998:1-112).

Converting face-to-face lectures to distance and online delivery requires lecturers to change their mode of 'in house' delivery. This can create some problems for lecturers who find this mode restrictive as it limits their ability to be immediately responsive, for example to interactions within their group of face-to-face students (Orr, 2002:23). This is often just a learning curve for staff adjusting to and becoming comfortable with the demands of providing lecture tapes, video conferencing and slides that are adequate to the needs of distance students. There is also a need to maintain the quality of the sound or other media and notes sent out to external students as this has not always been the case. The use of conference and online

technology is still in its early stages, though it has become more common in those universities with regional learning centres. As well as being invaluable to remote students, however, electronic delivery of lectures is also becoming a very significant tool for face-to-face students who can then have the same advantage of being able to access their lectures online and replay them a number of times (Orr, 2002:23, 27).

Most established higher education systems do currently take advantage of the old and the new methods of teaching and learning and virtual campuses are becoming more common across the globe. Such virtual teaching and learning systems, even if available, are not easily accessible by all learners due to their different learning styles and the difficulty of delivering and assessing some fields of study, particularly those where values, ideas and theories are discussed. Even conference telephones and Internet interest groups and chat lines do not afford the ease of debate and sharing of ideas that person-to-person and group discussions and tutorials afford in a physical campus or learning community. In 2001, John Seely Brown stated that: "learning is a remarkably social process" that occurs as the result "of a social framework that fosters learning" and not primarily as the result of "teaching." Now, more than ever, it is important for education institutions to encourage in students the skills for independent study and for lifelong learning. This will not only facilitate their learning in real and virtual classrooms, but train them to be lifelong learners, a very necessary skill in the knowledge economy.

There is a challenge also for regional campuses to provide for the increasing numbers of prospective mature age and postgraduate students in their embedded communities. This is largely due to more and more employees facing career changes throughout their working lives, and their need to undertake new courses or further training for work. It is also due to many individuals' desire to learn for personal

development, their interest in lifelong learning or their opportunity for 'second chance' tertiary education (OECD, 1999:21; Cooper *et al*, undated:6).

One recurring difficulty mentioned by regional students is that of not being able, in many cases, to complete their entire degree course from their regional base. For mature age students, particularly, it is often unrealistic to expect them to move to Perth. This causes frustration for the students and may, in turn affect, the long-term viability of the regional campus if it serves to deter many prospective students from enrolling (Orr, 2002:23). A possible alternative is delivering some units in 'block' mode as happens with many summer school programmes, for example at the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University in Perth and the University of Notre Dame in Broome. Block programmes can be delivered either at the regional campus or its parent campus. The benefit to students are gaining face-to-face interaction with lecturers, tutors and student colleagues and having only to 'move' for short periods of time, thus reducing the costs and disruptions to family lives and lifestyles.

### **Student mobility**

An important aspect to consider when assessing the feasibility of establishing new regional higher education campuses is that of why students move. Although some students do move inter-state to attend particular institutions, it is not yet clear whether this will become more frequent in the future if universities 'rationalise' the teaching programmes they deliver in line with the policy of 'specialisation to maximise resources' in the *Crossroads* paper *Varieties of Excellence* (McInnis, 1995:123; DEST, 200:28).

According to a 1999 report by the Federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the number of students under the age of twenty who moved to take up tertiary studies was approximately eleven per cent. More than half of those students moved between fifty and 150 kilometres but only 13.7 per cent moved greater distances from their homes. Metropolitan as well as non-metropolitan students moved but there are surprises in their reasons for doing so according to the DEST study in 2000. It showed that while many students moved to access specific higher education institutions, it was the students' choice of subjects and their overall academic ability that were of greater importance to them.

In a country as large as Australia, with its widely spread population base, it is not practicable to reduce some teaching programmes simply because there are other institutions also delivering similar courses or to capitalise on funding resources. There is the important social factor of equity to be considered. If more students are forced to move, or to move further afield, to embark on their chosen programmes of study then there will inevitably be a social as well as monetary cost involved due to the disruption to lifestyles and family groups. It will also cause a population drain in some locations as those students are less likely to return to their original areas (Goulter, 2002:3 and Paterson, 2001:141). This then becomes a fundamental consideration for regional campuses in determining who their local student groups are, or are likely to be, and what subjects would be necessary or important to them. This is particularly important for encouraging regional school leavers to enter tertiary studies if it means that they would then be able to stay within their familiar environment wherever and for as long as possible.

Obviously, however, there will always be some level of drift of students away from regional areas to 'real' or 'prestigious' universities, especially those

which deliver courses unavailable in rural areas beyond first year and foundation units, for example medicine, dentistry and law. This may also be affected by any changes to the higher education system which seek to rate Australia's universities according to the mythical 'top 100' or some other scale.

### **That first year on campus for regional students**

Making the transition from secondary school to university is an important step for all new students but the change can be even more radical for country students than for their metropolitan colleagues. There are considerable adjustments for all students to make when entering university for the first time, as they become 'socialised' and 'shaped' by the challenges of their new experiences, managing their own study and workloads often for the first time in their lives, whether they are school leavers or older (McInnis, 1995:9, 29, 55). For country students, however, attending campus in a city usually means they also have to contend with moving away from the support of home, family and a familiar environment. This often involves homesickness and loneliness along with the other emotional factors of becoming a university student for the first time and is especially so for very young students.

The social nature of teaching and learning is "probably more important in the first year of study than at any other time [but] whether the low levels of social interaction ... have an impact on their academic performance is not entirely clear" (McInnis, 1995:6). Although most new students have a positive outlook and are looking forward to their new lives, such a radical transition can come as a shock. Many universities in Australia now realise the importance of those first few weeks or months and have programmes in place to assist students to settle in to campus life and study. This has been shown to make a difference not only to the students' levels

of application and to their results, but also to the likelihood of completing their courses or dropping out of college (SCPIRS, 2000:273).

For mature age students, entering university often means the upheaval of the whole family from their regional centre, changing schools for the children, finding new homes and new employment.

### **Establishing needs**

The establishment of each new regional campus and learning centre brings a new set of challenges as each targeted community has a different demographic and geographic situation and set of social, economic and cultural circumstances. Each new learning centre must establish its own and its community's anticipated and felt needs, form strategies to engage with its community, and search for funding from public and private (usually localised regional) sources (Kemp, 1994:27-28). There is also the added difficulty of being unable to adequately predict student numbers in the first few years of operation which, in turn, can adversely affect government, community and parent-campus, where applicable, attitudes towards the infant learning centre, its viability and its funding levels (Orr, 2002:8). The student unit cost for regional students is likely to be much higher for a number of reasons than for metropolitan-based main campuses (Orr, 2002:22). This necessitates a determined level of commitment by the parent campus, its regional subsidiary and the local community in order to balance the increased administration and equipment costs of the smaller centre and its lesser number of students.

In any feasibility study for future regional higher education institutions in Western Australia, it is important to establish the real needs of the local community rather than relying simply on population statistics or gathering data (Bradshaw,

1972:33; Hughes, 2000:1; Kemp *et al*, 1994:1). Consultation must include all stakeholders, their local tacit and contextual knowledge must be taken into account or the community may end up with a ‘top down’ institution with a national or other focus rather than one that specifically meets their particular regional situation.

In determining the higher education needs of a specific region, it is important to understand its particular characteristics. Each region in Western Australia has very different geographic, historic, demographic, social and cultural features that will impact on any method of higher education instituted there and its success or failure. It is necessary to determine what regional policies and funding opportunities there might be; who or what the region’s stakeholders are, what the region’s expectations are, its networks, its social and human capital, its economy and levels of employment, and innovation (OECD, 1999:31). It is also important in any feasibility study of future higher education in the regions to ascertain, wherever possible, what the community’s level of commitment to, and engagement with, the campus is likely to be, as well as its probable student base.

There is a need for regional higher education institutions and regional agencies and organisations to communicate and collaborate with their colleagues and associates in other regions to facilitate the sharing of research programmes, resources and the transfer of knowledge between them to their own and their regions’ mutual benefit.

### **Engaging regions, universities and participation**

A regional university must do more than just operate “within a region” or as a remote campus delivering a small copy of its city-based equivalent (Foster, 1999:131). In an era where regional and national economies are driven by the

changes and challenges of global networks, the university must be sufficiently committed to and engage with its embedded community that it endeavours to increase the region's proportion of skilled and qualified individuals (Giddens, 1998:31). It must also undertake research and provide consultation to assist the region to sustain its established industries and launch new enterprises. As well as encouraging innovation, each regional campus must be responsive to its geographical position, the formal and informal networks that exist there and to the special needs and the culture of its area (Storper, 1997:43). Regional universities are ideally situated to embark on partnerships with local industries and institutions to provide teaching and learning programmes that are 'special' to the region. A prime example of this is the mining and mineralogy courses delivered by the School of Mines, Curtin University of Technology campus in Kalgoorlie and the Restoration Ecology Degree at the UWA campus in Albany. Regional universities, whether 'stand alone' institutions or 'outpost' campuses are ideally situated to use their 'region centred' knowledge to ensure future federal and state policies and development models accurately serve rural communities and are not just a replication of "inappropriate 'metro-centric'" interests (Goulter, 2002).

Apart from the more obvious reason of distance from a residential campus, studies in Australia have shown that socio-economic status also has a bearing on whether students are likely to continue beyond post-compulsory education. There is a seemingly ingrained prejudice against higher education evident particularly in the lower socio-economic areas of both urban and rural Australia (Turner, 1987). Establishing regional university centres will help to alleviate this by providing a visible presence and role models for regional students in their own communities.

Social analysis of the participation rates of students in higher education is complex, but usually takes into consideration home location and parents' occupations as the prime indicators. Students from more affluent homes are more likely to undertake tertiary study regardless of their home location but the figures are less likely to affect the overall socio-economic status of regional areas than in urban centres. This would seem to reinforce "social differentiation and [old family values] based on prestige, power and public influence" (Linke, 1988:1). In regions where there is no ready access to residential campuses, the financial burden on parents of students needing to relocate to urban centres can be prohibitive, making it very difficult for less affluent families to provide the necessary levels of support. In studies undertaken in South Australia, rural students showed considerably lower rates of participation than those in major urban areas but surprisingly, not as low as those in provincial cities, despite the socio-economic standing in those provincial centres being higher than the rural areas. The report did not mention whether there were higher education campuses in those regional cities included in the study (Linke, 1988:267-271).

According to Linke (1988:13) relying on regional analysis and population census information outside of urban areas can be problematic and does have limitations as the data does not necessarily "reflect the distinctive occupational and income structure of rural areas." It can, however, provide some useful data for guiding policy decisions by regional university administration and the various government bodies in issues such as education and health. However, the difficulty is that regions across as huge a country such as Australia differ enormously. For example, Rockingham is a region close to Perth, with a population of around 77,000 and an area of 261 square kilometres (<http://www.lgfocus.com.au/>

[editions/2003/november/rock\\_gear.shtml](#), 2003). The Kimberley in the North West of Western Australia, classified as 'remote' has a population of 30,500 has an area of 421,000 square kilometres (<http://www.regional.wa.gov.au/perspectives/kimberley/default.asp>, 2004). To compare them, or to judge them by the same criteria, is like comparing apples with oranges as their demographic and geographic conditions and identities are completely different. Clearly, any government intervention, or any system of regional higher education must be attuned to the different needs and conditions of each individual region rather than a blanket policy to cover them all.

Each regional campus influences and is influenced by its embedded community – its historical, geographical, social and cultural make up and the localised industries, knowledge and expertise within the region (OECD, 1999:15). Both the region and the regional university must capitalise on these human and economic capital aspects in order to be mutually successful (OECD, 1999:99; Garlick, 2000:114). Failure of higher education institutions to engage with stakeholders in their communities will risk their being marginalised both academically and economically (Davies in OECD, 1999:16).

Regional campuses are making great use of modern technology and flexible delivery methods where they are available. For example the iLearning system of UWA allows students to undertake units which would not otherwise be economically feasible. Students can “access their lectures electronically via the Internet rather than face-to-face ... [but] they receive exactly the same information as those studying in Perth” (UWA Handbook, 2004:100). The use of these systems will be influence and facilitate a demand for widening access to reliable information and communications technology (Wende, 2003).

As mentioned previously, there are no ‘stand alone’ regional universities in Western Australia, but all of the five universities have set up campuses or learning facilities in regional centres. Not all of these centres are ‘residential’ campuses, however, as some provide electronic delivery only of some courses or units through telecentres or TAFE facilities. Most campuses are combined or multi-level where the site and resources are shared with TAFE and other colleges or institutions. For example, Edith Cowan University offers some programmes at regional centres in Broome, Geraldton, Katanning and Albany but has a residential campus in Bunbury. Curtin University of Technology has residential campuses in Kalgoorlie and Northam (Muresk Agricultural College). Murdoch University has a medium-sized regional campus on a co-located site at Rockingham and is further developing its co-located site at Mandurah. Esperance also has a combined campus. Further information on some of these campuses is included in the Appendix to this work. It is presented as an indication only of the variety of educational services provided and reflects the diversity and distances of the State’s population centres. Each example is in an area that has shown significant population growth over the past two decades and has experienced substantial growth in tourism and other industries.

The purpose of clustering education and training providers in one campus is to provide higher education facilities to small communities where they would not otherwise be feasible due to the increased capital outlay required for separate buildings and in operating separate sets of amenities and services in each, for example libraries, bookshops and cafeterias (Goff, 2001:1). An advantage to the students is that they can articulate between both vocational education and training (VET) and university subjects and courses. There is always a challenge to the administrators, however, to ensure that the different “needs of the participating

sectors” are met (Goff, 2001:3). Where such co-located campuses have been established, it has often been initiated at the community level. In the Rockingham and Peel areas the local councils were strong campaigners for a campus to be established, while in Esperance it was the whole community that worked towards and provided support for the project.

One of the major challenges of regional campuses is to provide adequate library services. Edith Cowan University library in Bunbury is a very comprehensive facility that provides an excellent service to its campus. Similarly, the Rockingham combined campus of Murdoch and TAFE also has an excellent library, which in conjunction with the local municipal government, caters for students and for local residents to share in its use. The City of Albany library is being expanded to provide not only a great deal more books, but also unit reading materials and audio-visual equipment through working together with the ECU and UWA, the Great Southern Development Corporation and funding from DETYA (Orr, 2002:17). This will greatly improve services to the student community and residents of the Region.

### **Summary, conclusions and the future**

It is recognized that two of the most pressing needs of regional Western Australia are affordable, accessible higher education and the provision of reliable affordable, adequate and supported telecommunications, the lack of which will affect not only the viability and continuation of current regional higher education but also the establishment of any future campuses (Curtin University submission, Primary Industries and Regional Services, 2001:1). Both of these issues require the same solutions and rely on awareness of the situation by governments and stakeholders alike. It is crucial that regional communities take an activist role to ensure adequate

funding is provided for both telecommunications and whatever form of higher education is deemed relevant to their situations.

In conclusion, it is evident that though there has been an increase in access to higher education in many rural centres, there is much that still needs to be achieved, not only in education and training but also in the services that are required to facilitate such teaching and learning. The State's five universities, as well as state and regional local governments and their communities, are cognisant of the challenges of globalisation and its possible and probable effects on non-metropolitan Western Australia. Although there is competition between them in some areas, they are also working together in others to make higher education available to more small communities.

Any plans for future regional university campuses, whether branches of the established institutions or totally separate new enterprises need to be considered holistically, from a state-wide perspective, in economic and social contexts and not just in financial terms. Such institutions need to be social as well as economic assets not merely 'businesses.' Proposals for any new campus must assess the local needs and the skills required there to achieve that community's economic and social progress without unduly compromising its identity.

It is imperative that, through funding and other available support mechanisms, federal and state governments encourage the continuation of current higher education facilities in regional Western Australia and the establishment of further learning centres (Garlick, 1998:71). These will improve equity of access to the knowledge and skills needed by the regions to take an active role in their own management and to compete in the global economy. As put forward by the campuses in Whyalla, South Australia and Armidale, New South Wales, the expenditure

outlaid is far outweighed by both the quantifiable benefits of economic development returned to regional communities and the less definable though equally important social, cultural and environmental advantages.

Unless further resources are allocated to the provision of higher education facilities in regional and rural areas in Western Australia, their communities will continue to be seriously disadvantaged compared with their city cousins. Funding models need to take into account the special needs of the State's sparsely populated regional and remote communities, the associated higher per capita costs and the provision of more fully funded places to regional students to ensure equity (Jackson, 2002:1). This is important, not only for the ensuing increases in knowledge, social and economic capital, but also in allowing students, and ultimately their regions, to achieve their potential. This is crucial to regional development and to regional communities if they are not to be left behind either in a national or a global environment.

It has been argued here that higher education is necessary for the development of the regions. It is acknowledged, however, that Western Australia has circumstances that make the provision of physical campuses difficult in many instances. There are huge areas of this huge State that have very small and widely spread populations unable to support the cost of establishing and maintaining university or multi-sectoral campuses. There is also the dilemma of providing cost-effective, reliable and available telecommunications to remote areas of the State. The following chapter studies some alternatives, such as the fostering of learning regions and facilitated learning centres. The provision of distance education has changed enormously over the past hundred years, due mostly to the introduction of modern information technology communications systems.

How effective regional higher education and regional development will be will depend largely on how much or how little federal and state governments are prepared to take up the challenge. Government intervention is critical, not only in policy-making, but also in ensuring that their policies are followed through to practical conclusions. Governments must provide adequate funding for regional higher education and more fully funded student places across the nation. There is at present a deficit in the number of between 1500 and 1800 full time student places available in Western Australia when compared with the rest of Australia (ECU, 2002:2).

The Western Australian Higher Education Council was established in 1990 to “bring a State perspective to higher education and to foster co-operation between the State’s five universities” (DES website undated). This organisation provides a forum for discussion between the State Minister for Education and representatives from each university. I argue that it would be more valuable for higher education in Western Australia if membership of the Council were broadened to include representatives from across the State. Ideally, it could include representatives from the universities and TAFE colleges, their regional campuses and other experts in the higher education in WA as well as relevant participants from other fields. It would be advisable to include delegates from federal and state education departments, as also representatives from the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services and the State Department of Local Government and Regional Development. It would provide a more balanced vehicle for greater collaboration and co-operation among higher education institutions, government agencies and industries. It would also be advisable, where higher education campuses are established or proposed, for representatives from local industries, regional development bodies and local

councils, to have input. Their local knowledge and experience would be invaluable in planning higher education campuses that would properly address their local needs.

The brief for such a commission should be, as a body of consultants with much practical and relevant experience, to watch over higher education in the State and to provide avenues to expert advice. Ideally, they would co-ordinate the available funding, and have access to further and more adequate funding and resources. This is urgently needed to bring the State's education funding into line with Commonwealth funding to other states. The commission would be in a position to conduct needs assessments for and instigate future higher and further education campuses. It is my belief that such a group of dedicated, knowledgeable and experienced individuals and agencies would greatly assist in providing this State with a balanced approach to the provision of higher and further education.

## *Chapter five — the argument for learning regions and learning centres*

In this chapter I argue for the establishment of facilitated learning centres as a viable alternative to physical campuses in regional areas. I examine the concepts of learning regions and learning centres and their advantages over the more traditional distance education. I also consider a range of issues that affect the provision of higher education in regional Western Australia, including electronic media and telecommunications. This chapter will examine the following:

1. Concepts and praxis - learning regions, learning centres and telecentres
2. Learning regions
3. Why small learning centres?
4. Communities of practice
5. Telecentres
6. Communities, identities and practice
7. Facilitated learning centres
8. Minimising isolation
9. Distance education then and now
10. Information and communications technologies in regional Australia
11. Learning styles and electronic media
12. Summary and conclusions

## Concepts and praxis – learning regions, learning centres and telecentres

To begin I will clarify the way concepts are used in this chapter as a basis for discussion.

1. *Region*: ‘Region’ is used as a general term to denote non-metropolitan rather than metropolitan areas or communities. It refers to geographical and political areas of Western Australia such as the Pilbara, Great Southern, Kimberley or the Goldfields-Esperance Region.
2. *Learning region*: Learning regions and learning communities are interchangeable here as they refer to a gathering of people and organisations with a common set of values and objectives, though usually also in a particular geographical space. Learning regions or communities can also be groups of people connected through electronic space as in a virtual university. It may be a small city, town, hamlet or a farming, Indigenous or other group of people living as a community. Sellar *et al* argue that, (2005:3) “A learning region develops a culture in which people learn, research and share knowledge to sustain the economic health, quality of life and environment in the region.”
3. *Learning centres*: provide a place where community members, students, colleagues and small groups are supported during their learning programs. They usually are linked to one or more universities and TAFE colleges in Western Australia and elsewhere. They may or may not have a qualified facilitator. They may be in a geographical space or online. They are designed as a teaching and learning venue, providing students with a place where they can study together. They differ from telecentres

in that their main purpose is teaching and learning rather than also providing a range of business and other services to their embedded community.

4. *Telecentres*: are local community centres across regional Australia usually furnished with a comprehensive array of technical facilities and equipment. Most provide a venue for and a link to university, TAFE and other education courses. Some centres include local businesses and services, such as tourism, historical data, travel bookings, publishing and secretarial. Each telecentre is an independent incorporated body owned by the community in which it operates. Each has a local management committee and is usually operated by a part time co-ordinator ([www.telecentres.wa.gov.au/telecentres](http://www.telecentres.wa.gov.au/telecentres)).
5. *Communities of practice*: the term was first used in 1991 by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in relation to situated learning in a co-located setting, for example an organisation. Now more widely used to describe informal groups with a common interest and sense of identity who collaborate and share their knowledge, perceptions, experiences and goals. Communities of practice are ways of sharing tacit knowledge, developing social capital and stimulating innovation (Kimble *et al*, 2001:5).

### **Learning regions**

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about” (Margaret Wheatley, 2002)

The idea of a learning community or region has variously been “attributed to Dewey (1938) and his recognition of the importance of the social nature of all human learning ... and to Plato in the first century AD” (Kilpatrick *et al*, 2003:2). The concept has only grown rapidly in significance since an OECD conference in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1992 (ALA, 2000:4). According to Stavrou (2003:1) “[it] implies that collective learning for innovation takes place better in small, more contained social units — such as regions, localities or cities — where people have the opportunities to live interact and co-operate with each other in an immediate way.” One reason for its rise to prominence is that learning communities are seen as an essential tool for regional sustainability and development (Kilpatrick, 2000:7). Higher education and lifelong learning are also seen as instruments in helping communities to develop sustainable regions in a borderless world (Garlick, 1999:1). Universities have the opportunity to play a significant role in providing the necessary skills and expertise to regional areas.

As an example, the people of the town of Denmark in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia set up a learning community after a workshop held there in 2005. Their goal is to encourage a “culture in which people learn and share knowledge to develop and maintain [the] environmental health, quality of life and economic prosperity of Denmark” ([www.lcc.edu.au](http://www.lcc.edu.au), 2005).

Beddie (2003) argues that learning regions are happening naturally as communities grow and develop and their members learn from each other. However, the world is changing at such an accelerated pace that not all communities will have access to the kinds of knowledge they now need in order develop and be active in their own management. Some regions will need assistance from higher education institutions and other agencies or qualified facilitators.

In learning regions and learning centres there is a common objective. That is the learning is both formal and informal, tacit and explicit, it takes place where organisations, communities and individuals come together to devise learning strategies and work to increase their own skills and their region's competitiveness in the global framework and their own social and knowledge capital (Stavrou, 2001:2). Higher education institutions, as part of embedded communities and as consultants, can play a key role in designing strategies and building networks within and between the new learning communities (Stavrou, 2001:1; Goddard, 1997:1). According to Garlick (1998:70), "universities, especially those situated in regional areas, have the capacity to create and to "foster learning regions" adjacent to their established campuses and in other smaller population centres where 'established' campuses are not feasible. This will "spread and deepen the benefits that can flow from the kinds of economic development relationships that can occur between universities and their regional communities."

The notion of a learning region is a "community which seeks to overcome individual alienation and intellectual fragmentation [while] addressing the growing diversity among students in terms of age, race, ethnicity, religion, family and enrolment status," (Wilcox, 1992). Wilson argues that all communities learn because learning cannot be separated from action (Wilson, 1996:1). Learning regions constitute a community or group of communities which share a common goal. They function not only to learn and work for what the region itself needs, but also to provide supporting technologies and expertise for the learners in order for they and their region to achieve that goal (Wilson, 1996:1; Stavrou, 2001:2). It is very important when planning learning regions that the local communities own the process and can adapt the methods to the specific needs of their own students and

stakeholders (Wilson *et al*, 1995:137-157). A merely ‘top down’ approach is unlikely to be effective in achieving the specific goals and expertise that each learning region require unless all of the stakeholders are included in its planning and management. A culture of ‘bottom-up’ collaboration, self-reliance and self-confidence is likely to be much more successful. However, although the regions will need to be allowed a high degree of autonomy in their decision-making using their special local knowledge, some method of outside moderation will be required if the learning is to be nationally accredited and qualifications are to be awarded. The role of universities will be important, not only in providing formal teaching, assessment and evaluation, but also in encouraging learning communities in promoting lifelong learning, collaboration and partnership between all relevant stakeholders (van Leeuwen, 1997:2 and ALAI, 2002:2). Governments and higher education agencies will also be required to provide the financial support and expertise in many cases.

Each region is a network of relationships and sub-communities with a unique set of characteristics. As a learning region it is important to recognise and understand that network paradigm, its social and economic factors and its place in the region’s development (Nieuwenhuis, 1999:3). In his paper on learning regions and regional renewal, Morgan also refers to the ‘network paradigm’ as applying interactive innovations and social capital to regional development (1997:492). “What our world needs ... is ... flexible and functional learning environments where people, young and old, can be exposed to concepts and ideas relevant to their present and to their future” (Laszlo, E 2000:1). In a learning region, the community and its organisations work together on “problem-solving and innovation through trial and error as [part of their] informal learning processes, [and] in which social networks play an important role” (Nieuwenhuis, 1999:2, 7). Regions with well-developed networks tend to be

more successful as they usually have better infrastructure and are better able to reap the benefits of becoming learning regions (Nieuwenhuis, 1999:4).

In focussing on higher education and on lifelong learning, learning regions encourage an atmosphere in which further education is seen as a positive and desirable goal, as a way of life that everyone in the community can work towards and can achieve ([Education.au](http://Education.au), 2003). It is hoped that this will also, in time, be a catalyst for change in the negative attitudes towards higher education often found in regional and lower socio-economic groups in Australia.

Stavrou ( 2001:4) argues that learning regions that undertake skills audits will be very successful in encouraging “innovative actions and strategies to address economic or social needs and more particularly helping to build communities that achieve a balance between economic and social goals.” Margaret Mead said: “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever does,” (Banathy, 1999). Florida states that “regions are increasingly defined by the same criteria and elements which comprise a knowledge-intensive firm ... they must adopt the principles of the knowledge creation and continuous learning; they must in effect become learning regions” (1995:532). There are differences, however, in that learning regions must interact in an atmosphere of community, co-operation and negotiation rather than through the traditional management practices of “power and control” (Garlick, 1999:5).

The accelerated pace of change in the modern world is such that no region can afford to be left behind. To this end, it is imperative that Western Australia’s regions become “learning regions” (OECD, 1999:20) taking advantage wherever possible of information technology and higher education to set up learning centres, either as physical campuses or some other feasible and workable alternative.

Successful learning regions will be able to adapt to the changes in their local and global environments by capitalising their knowledge and acquiring relevant new skills. They will be able to build their existing links and form new networks within their local and regional communities and globally that will be “mutual and self-reinforcing” (OECD, 1999:22). If at least some facility for higher education is not provided to more regional and isolated centres, those communities risk being fragmented and their members excluded from participation in the knowledge society of the future. Failure to take advantage of the social and electronic communications available to metropolitan communities will condemn their regional equivalents to declining socio-economic status (OECD, 1999:20).

The potential for learning regions to provide higher education to small groups and communities is a step towards a commitment to lifelong learning in small population centres where access to higher education is currently not available (Morgan, 1997:491-503). I consider that they have some advantages over the more traditional forms of distance education by encouraging a sense of community and collegiality for groups of people who come together to teach, to learn or just exchange a few ideas and experiences.

### **Why small learning centres?**

The number of higher education co-located campuses is expanding in Western Australia and this is contributing to a widening of access in areas other than Perth. Such campuses provide a range and quality of post-compulsory and continuing education to the State’s smaller cities and regions where insufficient funding and low student numbers could not support a major institution. However, for yet smaller towns and population centres, even multi-campus such as the Esperance Community College would be beyond their capacity to support. Those

smaller, but equally deserving, communities in regional areas of Australia may, perhaps, be better served by other alternatives, for example learning centres. These may be facilitated in that they employ a qualified lecturer/administrator, or be simply a centre where individuals may come together to study as community learning together. As with learning regions, facilitated learning centres need support from universities and government bodies to enable them to operate in small rural and remote communities and offer access to all levels of education to their communities. A qualified facilitator will present an element of personal contact and social interaction. The provision of information and communication technologies to those centres will also assist in building networks among learning centres large and small across the State, the nation and the world. An ever-widening choice of university and other courses will be accessible to all individuals whether to pursue lifelong learning for career and/or personal development.

It is not absolutely necessary for a learning centre to have a qualified facilitator present in order to function, and even function well. However, such a person will be valuable as a leader and manager of the centre and take care of its day-to-day organisation, budgets and funding, supervision, mentoring and possibly also teaching. One or more suitably skilled and qualified staff will be required to provide not only teaching and mentoring but also administrative skills to support the learners. Some fund-raising expertise may also be required to access other financial backing in addition to public funding if the centre is to achieve some level of permanency in its community. The staff would be in a position to deliver other skills which remote and isolated communities do not always have, for example in preparing submissions for funding, negotiation, management, planning and small

business. These services are currently supplied in some of the telecentres and in the regional campuses and learning centres.

### **Facilitated learning centres**

Research has shown that students in learning communities, whether they are in schools, campuses or in small groups in learning centres are likely to feel more comfortable with their learning, have a more positive attitude to their learning and to be higher achievers (SUNY, 2004:1; ODE, 2002:2). Learning is fundamentally social (Brown, 2003:2). Learning together affords an added benefit of creating social inclusion and adding to the group's social capital. It is important, however, to determine the social norms in each group in order to gain trust, collaboration and a unified sense of purpose. Each community is unique, so in setting up each new learning centre care must be taken to design it to fit its local group. It should not be an over-arching 'one size fits all' style of teaching and learning system that seeks to change the community to such a degree that it loses its identity and the reason its people and organisations belong there.

When designing the particular facilitated learning centre, teaching and learning is much more effective when the tacit knowledge of the local community is given due consideration (Polanyi, 1966:4 and Durrance, 2001:2). Masini (2001:69) argues that "the centre "must bridge the gap between theory, practice and the existing value system regarding explicit and tacit knowledge." Learning communities already "create and share their own knowledge" but the task of a lecturer or facilitator can add the more specific knowledge its members require to that tacit information already existing in its local context (Allee, 2000:3).

Learning centres present a role model to their embedded communities that supports the social nature of teaching and learning and provide a sense of community and commitment to lifelong learning. Although small learning centres are not able to reproduce the college atmosphere of larger campuses, they do afford a social cohesion or inclusion where groups of students can come together to work and learn and provide peer group support for each other as well as networking. As the learning centre builds recognition of its work in the rural community it is hoped that it will encourage school leavers and others to participate in further learning, as have the university campuses established in the larger country towns across Australia. They may also encourage young people to stay in the area, thus helping to reduce the population decline (Black *et al*, 2000:58-60).

Durrance (2001:7) argues that “Whatever learning technology is used ... the same basic ingredients are necessary for success: a [suitably qualified lecturer or] facilitator, a learning environment, action, reflection and trust.” All learning is influenced by the students’ own store of tacit knowledge and by their particular family, community and other circumstances (Flood, 2000).

### **Telecentres in Western Australia**

Telecentres are included here as they have till quite recently been the only electronic hub in many small rural and isolated regions and have delivered education and training at remote sites for some universities, TAFE and other training bodies. It is also reasonable to expect that they can evolve into facilitated learning centres with the addition of qualified staff.

The idea for telecentres or telecottages first started in Sweden in 1985, their purpose being to provide electronic services in rural and remote small communities.

Telecentres have given out-of-the-way communities the opportunity to communicate with the world, acquire new skills and to take part in the knowledge economy as an aid, to some extent, in overcoming the isolation experienced by many such communities. The first telecentre in Australia was launched in Walcha in New South Wales in 1992 (Suzuki, 1998:1; Fuchs, 1998:2).

The first telecentre in Western Australia was opened in 1991. There are now more than one hundred in rural communities (some of which have less than two hundred residents) allowing for everyday connection with each other and with the information society (2004, [http://www. telecentres.wa.gov.au/telecentres](http://www.telecentres.wa.gov.au/telecentres)). Along with the few higher education campuses already existing in regional areas of the state they are providing a greater access than was previously available. They assist their local communities in stemming rural decline, improving connections as well as building self-esteem and job prospects in their local areas (Short, 2002:24). Each telecentre in Western Australia is owned by its local community and usually has a part-time co-ordinator, support staff and a management committee. Federal, State and Local Government bodies, as well as education and training institutions and private companies jointly fund them. They are also assisted with monetary and 'in kind' support from their local communities (Short, 2002:20; Fuchs, 1998:5). They also provide access to lifelong learning courses for seniors, Scitech science courses for children and all levels of schooling, as well as Internet and other information services. Telecentres have been instrumental in creating learning regions where information and communications technology did not exist earlier. They provide computer literacy skills in areas that may not have had reliable electronic equipment before they were set up and also provide valuable social networking for the users.

It is possible that even as more households and small businesses acquire their own electronic equipment, telecentres will continue to provide a valuable service of telephones, facsimiles and video-conferencing to small businesses, families and individuals, but could evolve into facilitated learning centres. They have already in many centres delivered distance education via audio-visual means, connecting with schools, universities, TAFE colleges and other training centres.

### **Communities of place, identities and practice**

Each gathering or community is a unique, separate, identifiable unit with its own spatial and human characteristics and its own ways of working together within its community and with other communities for their mutual benefit. Over time, learning regions become communities of practice as the participants work together to achieve their common goals. These may consist of groups of individuals, whether in a small closely-knit remote community, a town, a professional association, place of work or through an internet-based mailing list. They may have originally come together to work on a specific project or teach and study but stayed together to achieve other community goals. In both formal and informal ways they discuss their common interests, their goals and experiences. In telling their stories, they share memories, “transfer best practice and provide mechanisms for situated learning, and act as foci for innovation” (Alani *et al*, 2003:1; Kahan, S: 2003:1). Groups of people coming together for learning can share their knowledge and ideas and build social as well as subject-specific networks for their mutual benefit and for their community and region. “Knowledge capital, and particularly tacit knowledge capital, is built up through people communicating with each other both in face-to-face and telecommunications channels” (O’hara, 2001). In *The Promise and Paradox of Community*, Margaret Wheatley (1998) writes that knowing what makes it unique

and what its goals are gives each region a clear sense of its collective purpose, identity and sense of place and gives it strength and resilience. A sense of “community of place” is increasingly important in a rapidly changing and borderless world if regions are to generate an environment that will encourage knowledge transfer and economic advantage (Kanter in Garlick and Garlick, 1999:2).

### **Minimising isolation**

Australia’s unique geographic and demographic conditions have contributed to the comprehensiveness of its distance education experience – its isolation as an island with the vast majority of its population being in the south-east and coastal areas, the remainder being in regional, rural and remote locations across the country (King, 1999:1-13). It has been a world leader in the field of distance education, particularly for primary school children. Its geographical isolation and its relatively small population compared with its physical size have been a factor in the development of distance education in its evolving forms. With often huge distances between remote communities and stations, isolation has always been an issue for students, their families and teachers to contend with.

It was some years after the Correspondence School and School of the Air were established that distance and external studies were made available to older children and adults. The establishment of regional campuses, learning centres and computer-mediated communication is a further step in the evolution of higher and further education systems for country people in Australia (Lawley, 1994:1).

Isolation is an important issue for rural and isolated communities, though as more people and groups are connected to information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the Internet, some of the separation will dissolve. In small

communities in the past, small country schools, often of only one-room provided primary education for children who had then, quite often, had to leave home to attend secondary and further education. It is now possible to provide kindergarten to post-compulsory education to small groups of children and adults through facilitated learning centres and the information super highway. While the provision of such education services are often not cheaper than provision for internal students, they can at least be provided where the cost of a physical campus would be prohibitive or impracticable.

By using satellite and or telephone technology, isolation can be minimised through mentoring and tutoring programmes and building networks of expertise, connections with other students and with people with similar interests and expertise. The use of the World Wide Web can reduce the sense of isolation as rural and remote users become familiar with the technology. It not only connects with their home campus, but also becomes a window to the world with all its libraries and information databases at their fingertips. As their skill in using computer technology and the web increases, so will their skills in evaluating the content and credibility of the web for their studies and networking (Fetherston, 2001:3).

### **Distance education then and now**

Modern technologies have changed the way distance education is delivered. Australia's long tradition of distance education, originally through correspondence and School of the Air has become much more flexible and immediate. It has also evolved and internationalised - the world is now its market, from kindergarten to postgraduate studies and an ever-widening catalogue of subjects. Now, given the necessary telecommunications equipment and services, everyone can access distance learning at vocational, undergraduate, postgraduate and personal development levels

through a variety of technologies, from the still useful postal service to satellite communications. However, modern life is becoming ever more complex and the pace of change too rapid for traditional forms of distance education to adequately serve students now and in the future. Originally, isolated students relied on the postal service for receipt of their lessons and while this was excellent, it often meant waiting weeks or months to receive lesson plans and resources. Then it was again weeks or months to receive feedback from the teachers on work submitted. Also, not all subjects can be successfully delivered via online or more traditional forms of distance education. It is still necessary, however to attend a physical campus somewhere in Australia or overseas to undertake practical studies for some, such as laboratory work although it is possible in some areas to access regional high school or local industry facilities (TIAC, 1997:2).

From the 1930s onward, distance education was broadcast on Alfred Traegar's pedal wireless until the 'School of the Air' was commenced in 1951 and based in Broken Hill, giving outback children the opportunity to learn at home and to be part of the then biggest classroom in the world ([http://www.backobourke.com.au/history\\_page/history.html](http://www.backobourke.com.au/history_page/history.html)). Since then, distance education has grown, so that it is now provided by most established higher education institutions in Australia, TAFE colleges, private training institutions and professional and trade associations. Their students may be resident anywhere in Australia or the world and may be studying an array of short courses, trade qualifications or postgraduate degrees (TIAC, 1997:2). Students may choose to study via distance (external) mode rather than internal mode even when they live reasonably close to campus. Reasons for this vary, for example, the time spent travelling to and from campus could be spent studying, students are unable to take time off work or again may be involved in the full time care of other

family members. In 1999, approximately thirteen per cent of higher education students in Australia were studying in distance (external) mode (DETYA, 1999:4-5). It can be difficult to determine what proportion of these students were in rural or isolated areas and would study through internal mode if a higher education campus or learning centre were established close to their home or work environment.

Desmond Keegan (1986:49) described distance learning as: “the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process; the influence of an educational organisation both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and support services and the provision of two-way communication between student and tutor.” Thus, distance education is differentiated from open learning which is defined as being less structured, with more flexible entry and exit points and students have the option of negotiating course content, assessment instruments and time frames (Caladine, 2001).

Lewis has described open learning as “an elastic concept, maybe too flexible for its own good” (Lewis, 1988:90); while this may be so, open learning has been the vehicle of thousands of rural and remote students in Australia, as elsewhere, to study the subjects they need. Open learning particularly facilitates those work-related certificate and diploma courses for employees in outlying mining communities as delivered by the Karratha and Hedland Colleges in Western Australia (Curtin CRE, 2005:1) and leisure subjects which do not necessarily require creditable assessment or for which the students do not need or do not want awarded qualifications.

Distance learning has undergone a revolution in the past few years as it was considered something of a ‘Cinderella’ or “second-string” and that such qualifications were somehow of a lesser worth than qualifications gained from

studying internally. In the past decade, however, all higher education institutions from Harvard to the smaller regional campuses around the world have recognised the importance of distance education and now deliver some or all of their courses via electronic media and the more traditional correspondence methods (Abernethy, 1997:87). The more traditional methods are still a valuable teaching and learning tool where, particularly, small remote communities do not have constant access to the information super highway and those for whom being away from home and work is out of the question (Rumble, 1992:3).

### **Information and communications technologies (ICTs) in regional Australia**

#### *ICTs*

It is essential to consider the implication of information and communications technologies (ICT) in any debate concerning regional higher education in Western Australia (OECD, 1999:47). Not only are ICTs vital to flexible delivery of teaching programmes, they are essential tools in building human and knowledge networks and affiliations within local communities and across national and international barriers. ICTs are able, also, to act as a catalyst for the provision of more reliable telecommunications services than are present in many rural and remote regions of the State. This then also enhances the region's technological infrastructure and its access to a variety of information systems and networks, not the least of which is the possibility of reliable access to the Internet for online delivery of teaching and training programmes. In turn this allows for an increased entrepreneurship, innovation and an expanding economy offsetting the cost of installation and maintenance of such ICTs.

### *Telecommunications*

The infrastructure issue of providing information and communications technology in all areas outside of the Perth Metropolitan Area must be urgently addressed to allow for further provision of higher education. This will require government intervention that is actual, practical and real rather than just political rhetoric that all too frequently is not followed through. Although it has been mentioned before in earlier chapters it is worth mentioning again here that, despite living in the ‘space age,’ telephone and other communications services in regional and remote areas of Western Australia are not ideal as Siekierka *et al* stated in their Telecommunications Needs Assessment (2003). Satellite communications are at present too expensive to be readily usable in isolated regions of Australia.

Even where telecommunications systems are available, service is often unreliable due to distances, congestion and limited bandwidth; also the infrastructure to support and maintain those systems is often absent or haphazard (SCPIRS, 2000:ix, 72-5). Information technology is vital to regional and remote communities for ‘social cohesion’ and for economic feasibility and growth (SCPIRS, 2000:115).

A recurring theme of this work has been that of limited, unavailable or unreliable telecommunications service in rural and remote areas. Without reliable access there is little chance of the smaller and more remote communities in Australia gaining access to higher education unless through the old fashioned ‘snail mail’ version of distance education. Information and communications technologies are essential tools in modern economies and in methods of flexible teaching and learning methods but they do need to be properly supported and maintained (Alasoini, 2001:3-4).

Soros (1998:20) argues that one of the deficits of globalism is “the uneven distribution of benefits.” While not for a moment denying the importance of the national and global view of Australia, it would be tragic for the country’s future if the current deficit in regional services and facilities were to continue. The Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services in its *Report of the Inquiry into infrastructure and the development of Australia’s regional areas*, stated that “those in the metropolitan and some large provincial areas continue to gain improved access to all areas of infrastructure and in particular, telecommunications, while those in the traditional heartland of regional and rural Australia face the prospect of declining access to many services and a lack of improvement in infrastructure.” There is an urgent need to address this situation for regional communities to allow them to establish learning centres and to make use of flexible delivery methods of higher education through learning centres, for access to the internet and for contact with their tutors and lecturers without the need to travel great distances often at great expense and inconvenience to themselves and their families. Information technology is vital to regional and remote communities for ‘social cohesion’ and for economic feasibility and growth (SCPIRS, 2000:115). No governments can afford to ignore the 30 per cent of the nation’s population who live in regional and remote areas and the contribution those communities can make to its future.

Without reliable access there is little chance of the smaller communities or even more remote population groups in Australia gaining access to higher education unless through the old fashioned ‘snail mail’ version of distance education. Modern online flexible delivery methods depend on fast, reliable electronic communications yet many small “communities lack adequate basic communications technology” (Siekierka *et al*, 2003 Executive Summary).

### *The virtual university*

The virtual university is only briefly described in this chapter as an alternative form of flexible delivery because it does not meet the need for social interactivity implicated in community or facilitated learning. The definition of virtual university is open to question. It has variously been defined as ‘open’ university, as distance education and online delivery. Today, it more commonly considered to be one that delivers traditional higher education through non-traditional methods, that is, via telecommunications such as satellites and the Internet without the need for an actual physical campus. Given adequate ICTs, a virtual campus can be established anywhere as neither lecturers, nor tutors nor students attend in person. Their staff and students may all be scattered across the world coming together only via online, telephone or video-conferencing.

### *Learning styles and electronic media*

It is well known that people learn in different ways and that electronic forms of teaching and learning will not suit all learners (Kilian, 1996). Most successful learning is acquired through a continuing process of different methods, listening, looking, reading, doing and relating it to the student’s ‘real world’ experience. It is difficult though not impossible for electronic media, to achieve this. It is difficult to deliver practical and hands-on demonstrations and practice through videos and online. I believe students would be better served through facilitated learning centres where lecturers, mentors and local practitioners may be available for the ‘social’ aspects of learning.

The designers of teaching and learning programmes that will be delivered in facilitated (and distant) learning centres have other challenges to face than those

delivering internal classes only. To “encourage metacognition in their students, instructional design needs to be specifically planned for web delivery rather than just mounting internal course material” (Fetherston, 2001:7). The design must consider how the students will gain both the theory and practice of their subjects if the learning is to be successful and transferable into everyday use.

There are pedagogical challenges involved in delivering teaching programmes via the World Wide Web which relate to students’ learning styles (Fetherston, 2001:2). There is a risk that learning will be merely transmissive or passive and will fail to fully engage the students to encourage deep learning allowing transfer of the information absorbed into meaningful ‘real life’ practical applications (Fetherston, 2001:2). Electronic teaching and learning systems will overcome some of the problems associated with passive learning if they are designed to incorporate the social and collaborative aspects of learning. They will need to include features that provide opportunities for some interactivity and practical projects as well as encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning (James, 1997:2). In rural and remote communities where computerised technology has not been so widespread, providing students with the skills to become comfortable in its use builds their self-confidence and removes the technophobia which so many non-computer users experience (James, 1997:10).

One of the problems associated with electronic delivery and assessment of teaching and learning is that it can be very difficult to discover just how much the student has actually understood. Often, the assessment instruments are multiple-choice questions that tend to be fragmented at best. They do not give an indication of whether the student has actually learnt enough of the subject to use it in solving problems or applying it to real world situations. One solution that I have used is a

feedback strategy, to combine the question and answer instrument with the more traditional essay format. This gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their deeper understanding of the subject. The question and answer multiple-choice system gives the student and lecturer instant feedback on what the student does or does not know of the subject but this method does not give an adequate evaluation of student ability in many cases (Fetherston, 2001:6). This has proved to be very helpful to many distance students who do not have the opportunity to speak to lecturers either via tele- and video-conferencing or via email.

### **Summary and conclusions**

The availability of higher education to regional and remote communities has increased dramatically in the past two decades, thanks mostly to the spread of ICTs, along with a growing awareness that that all citizens have a right to access it and that regions matter. There is still a long way to go though before everyone in regional Western Australia has an acceptable level of choice of when, where and how they will access higher education that is akin to that of metropolitan students. The five universities in Western Australia have endeavoured to extend access and equity to many regional students and it is hoped that all levels of governments will assist them in their quest for yet greater coverage. Learning regions and learning centres will provide an integrated approach to the development and sustainability of regional Western Australia – in large and small communities alike.

The diversity of systems and techniques of delivery has also increased. While the traditional forms of distance education are still available to all, the more advanced and instant electronic methods are still beyond the reach of many rural and isolated communities and their residents. It is hoped, however, that this too will improve in the foreseeable future. The proposed full privatisation of Telstra has

given many country people a sinking feeling that they will again be left behind in the issue of adequate, reliable and fully maintained and supported telecommunications services.

## *Chapter six – higher education – then, now and in the future*

I have endeavoured in this thesis to give the reader an overview of higher education in Australia, including a background to its history, some of the major changes that have occurred and the influences that have brought these changes about. In particular however, I have attempted to provide an outline of the higher education system, as it exists in regional Western Australia at the present time. More specifically, I have argued the case for improving access and equity to more rural and remote locations throughout the State, as I believe this State has special issues to be considered. By virtue of Western Australia's size, the broad range in densities of population, and the difficulty in providing telecommunications services over such huge distances create complexities in providing greater equity and access in higher education.

Whatever form higher education centres may take in regional Western Australia in the future, they will have a common goal, to increase the economic, social and knowledge capital of their embedded communities. A concerted effort between all members of those communities, the relevant government agencies, industry representatives and individuals will ensure a lasting benefit for all. Whatever form of delivery higher education takes in the future it will be determined as much by each community and its own perceived needs and aspirations as by governments, universities and other training institutions (Fuchs, 1998:2).

Higher education provision in regional Western Australia is a product of multiple and complex factors. For example, its remoteness from Canberra is a subject of concern when federal policies on education, health and welfare are proposed and put in to practice without taking our special needs into consideration.

Overall funding is one example, as this State has the second lowest ratio of fully funded university places per capita in Australia (Commonwealth, Official Committee Hansard, Senate, 30/09/2003, 6947). This disadvantages many students from lower socio-economic, as well as rural and remote, areas in the State.

Another issue affecting access to higher education in this State is that the population in Western Australia is more concentrated in one major centre than elsewhere in Australia. This has the consequence of leaving huge areas of the State with very small population centres. Perth is the only major city. All the State's government departments are based there and all policies and decision-making are conducted there. It is argued that this has an adverse effect on the rural and remote areas of the State when all those directly affected are not given consideration in the due processes of government.

### **Politics, critique, and a 'world view'**

I have discussed here in this thesis the changes wrought by various governments and their policies and practices during Australia's short history of higher education. Critiques are not of specific governments or political parties, but of their policies and practices as they pertain to higher education systems. The criticisms levelled here are of the neoliberal monetarist theories underpinning almost all western governments in the past generation or so and their rebuttal of humanist ideals. I have argued that governments have a responsibility to provide health, welfare and education policies and practices that benefit all of society, whether city-based, in regional or in isolated communities, whether rich or poor (Hennessy, 2000).

Governments, whether neoliberal or of any other political following, must be mindful that they are answerable to the society that elected them. Political theories wax and wane but higher education has lasted two thousand years and will, hopefully, last as long as there is a society on earth to benefit from it. Economic rationalism is a policy for now, not for the future. If allowed too strong a hold on the management of essential services and institutions such as education, health and welfare, it will be at the expense of society and will, as Polanyi feared, destroy the fabric of that society.

*Crossroads* and its proposals quite rightly created enormous response from across Australian society, not just from those in the higher education system whom it most directly affected. Every individual in Australia, wherever they live, whether or not they attend university or never even intend to, is in some way affected by the higher education system because of its huge impact on our society as a whole. We are each of us stakeholders in our society and it depends on our becoming educated and active citizens for it to survive and to progress. We need to be aware of what the changes to higher education mean to present and future society, particularly the neoliberal moves towards an ‘enterprise’ system. If we allow such an important institution as higher education to become merely another corporation, then it becomes subject to the same conventions and consequences as any other business venture and we have all seen the roller coaster ride that economies and corporations have suffered through the different political and monetary theories of the past fifty years.

### **Size matters, Western Australia and its special conditions**

Western Australia covers over one third of the nation’s land mass but has less than ten per cent of its population. It has 1.9 million people, almost seventy per cent

of whom live in Perth, and a population density across the State of only one person per 1.4 square kilometres (CCIWA, 2004). The State is so large that many small communities are remote from any town of any real size and have not the benefit of reliable broadband, dial-up or digital communications, which make telecentres and online distance learning difficult if not impossible unless they have access to satellite communications that are still expensive. As mentioned earlier regional areas of Australia have long been the ‘poor country cousins’ with regard to available and reliable telecommunications services, despite living in the ‘space age’ (Walker, 2003; Siekierka, 2003).

## **Then**

Higher education in Australia has seen some enormous and far-reaching changes since Sydney University opened its doors to its first students one hundred and fifty-five years ago. At that time the founding fathers probably expected their college would last, relatively unchanged, for a hundreds of years, as have Bologna, Cambridge and the Sorbonne. However, that world has gone forever and the traditional “ivory tower” style of university has also disappeared. In the time that formal higher education has existed in Australia there have been greater and more far-reaching changes in education than in the whole foregoing period from Plato and Socrates to 1851. Communications have been a catalyst for that change. For example, in the first students’ years at Sydney University, a letter would have taken months to reach their colleagues in Europe but now it can bounce off a satellite and be there in seconds.

## Now

Regardless of which political party has been in power in either Federal or State Governments in Australia in the past fifty years, they have each left their mark on higher education. Higher education policy has expanded, contracted and evolved as each new theory is put into effect. It is a given that, as the country's population has grown and although the number of universities and regional campuses has grown, the level of public funding for universities and for each student has diminished.

For a country where formal higher education has existed for such a relatively short time, Australia has achieved a prodigious success in gaining its foothold in comparison with many other OECD nations. That foothold is now slipping as higher education expenditure has fallen from being above the OECD average (6.47% in 1985) to 5.46% in 1998. That it continues to fall is a sign that all is not well with the system (Marginson, 2001:2). The reducing levels of funding and proposed changes are evidence that recent governments in Australia do not hold higher education in as high regard as do many other established and emerging nations. Marginson (2001:2) argues that, in this neoliberal age, the Federal Government has moved the responsibility for investment in education to the students and their families. In its submission to the Senate Committee in 2001, the Queensland Government argues that the Commonwealth needs to inject an extra one billion dollars each year over five years into the higher education system. In my view, Australia will move even further away from creating a knowledge economy if it continues to reduce public funding in higher education. As Australia's position on the OECD scale is slipping other countries, recognising the imperatives of higher education in the knowledge economy, have increased their funding per capita and hence their overall ranking. As

Australia's position falls behind the danger is that higher education in regional Australia will diminish even further.

### **Marketplace or social contract – are they mutually exclusive?**

So what is higher education all about then? It is not about, or should not be about becoming an elite system which only a very few can afford regardless of their ability to participate. It is not, or should not be, primarily about export dollars or making profits for governments or private industries. Higher education is an essential social and socialising institution that has a responsibility to its academic community, its student body, its embedded community and to the nation even in a borderless world. This now is even more essential at a time when global media tends to homogenise societies and where their cultures risk becoming subjugated to the more dominant themes of globalisation, free trade and neoliberalism. Governments have a responsibility to maintain their social contract and not allow it to be entirely subverted by the rules of the marketplace in the mistaken belief that there is no other way.

### **The future in a borderless world**

It is difficult to say what the future holds for higher education systems or for their embedded societies anywhere in this knowledge economy and borderless space we now call our world. Since the dawn of the age of reason, ideas and ideals have changed with each new generation and each new discovery in science and knowledge. It is argued here that, while acknowledging and making some allowances for the imperatives of the marketplace, higher education should continue in its vital tradition as a guardian of all the knowledge and culture that will serve all of its society well. It must also continue to be a means for undertaking the high

quality independent research, teaching and learning which its community, its country and every individual needs. Higher education will have a bleak future if it is revolutionised out of all recognition of its previous structure and purpose, into just another commercial enterprise. As has happened to many other large corporations in recent times, through ever-deepening funding cuts and staff shortages, it then runs the risk of being downsized out of existence.

### **Globalisation, free trade and the regions**

In the past few years we have seen both the negative and positive aspects of globalisation, and the strong emotions it has engendered. I would argue that it could have a very positive effect on regional Australia if it gives their communities an impetus for change, for becoming innovative and learning regions. Free trade agreements and GATS on the other hand have the potential to disadvantage small nations such as Australia and its regions (Morris, 1997; Oliver, 2004:1-7). Morris argues that free trade is not value-free, as it purports to be. That, by implication, it is merely “material self-interest” that drives bigger markets to over-run smaller ones, that it takes away their self-reliance, sovereignty and competitiveness. As Weber argued, nothing is value-free (Turner, 1998:12). Wherever people, their livelihoods and their sense of place are involved there are relevant political, economic or social values present. I have argued that government policies for the development of regional Australia must include the stakeholders in each of its diverse regions if the negative aspects of free trade and globalisation are not to override their future progress. I would argue, albeit optimistically, that a higher education commission would give all its members an opportunity to present their ideas in an atmosphere which respects their values and goes some way to designing and establishing a more fair and equitable system. Each region would have input into the type of higher

education facility it could support and that would address its particular circumstances.

### **The re-emergence of the local**

Wood (1999:1) argues that, simultaneously with the expansion of globalisation, there is a “re-emergence of the local as a seat of influence and identification.” Higher education has and will continue to have an essential role to play in both the globalisation of higher education, and in the development of the regions. This is equally as true for small and remote communities as for major cities, as no longer can any of them exist in isolation from each other and from the world thanks to television and the information superhighway. Even as globalisation increases this sense of a borderless world, regions are becoming crucial to the social and economic progress of nation states and alliances. It is, as Kanter put it, time to “think global but act local” (1997). It is about social and human capital, about building societies up. It is about giving them the knowledge and skills for which they have a compelling need if they are to compete in this new restless global environment in which we all now live and into which our children will grow.

We cannot afford as a nation to allow higher education to fall further behind. Nor can we afford to allow our regional population to be left behind, as they will be if further funding and student places are not urgently forthcoming. All members of our society have a fundamental right to an equal opportunity to higher education “to fulfil their potential, regardless of personal circumstances and backgrounds” (Nairn, 2002:4). To ignore the mounting research on the importance of regions and localities and to continue to deprive them of equal and accessible higher education will condemn them to further decline and separation from the new world economy.

The cultural, geographic and social characteristics that make them unique can and will be the mechanisms by which the regions can forge sustainable futures. As argued in chapter four, higher education has an important role to play in guiding and working with their embedded communities to achieve their goals for mutual benefit. Universities can utilise Kanter's 'three Cs' (1997) - concepts, competence and connections to help regions become learning regions, become networked and competitive in the global economy.

### **Academia, society and change**

Certainly academia will change as it has had to do to keep pace with the accelerated pace of change in society, but if it changes beyond its primary role of research, teaching and learning to one of merely profit-making, surely our society will ultimately be the loser. As with any other institution in society, it is important to establish which traditions are relevant and should be valued and retained, not discarded merely because they served an earlier period of time and the world is now different. To take such a radical step would be to deny our rich history and culture, our society would lose its identity and social cohesion. Universities have, traditionally, served as a wellspring of their embedded society's cultural, political and social history and knowledge. If, as in the *Crossroads* Review, "universities need to recognise that they too are businesses" (2002:30), serving only some sections of the community, they risk losing their special place in society and changing beyond their capacity ever to regain it when the winds of neoliberalism inevitably fade away. Universities need to respond to their embedded communities whether local, regional or national for the social, cultural and economic as well as political benefit of all (Paterson, 2001:140). Higher education is an essential element in any civil society and is becoming even more so in a learning society.

## **Time is running out**

Change, and how we deal or not deal with it, is probably the single most common issue in all of our lives. We cannot turn back the tide, but must be wise enough to work towards a solution that provides Australia with an academic system that is of world standard while serving our community, culture and identity (Aitken, 2002:184). The anticipated changes to higher education in Australia will inexorably determine how we, as a nation, cope with change, accept it and benefit from it. In turn, this will determine how other nations perceive us and whether our place in the world order is enhanced or diminished. Whether we see globalisation as having a positive or a negative impact for ourselves, for the world and its people, it has and will continue to affect us for the foreseeable future (AFLF, 2000:4). Education, and particularly higher education, will be our best system for learning to take the best that globalisation has to offer and ensuring that Australia is not negatively affected by it.

Higher education, in whatever form is feasible, will strengthen communities in rural and remote areas. Not to recognise this fact is to allow time to run out for Australia's regions and for their development (House of Representatives SCPIRS, 2000). The ramifications for all rural populations in a global knowledge-based economy are that they will then be left behind with little or no chance of ever catching up. They also need to achieve the competencies required by modern technology and to acquire new skills and knowledge if Australian society is not to become further fragmented, widening the divide that already exists between city and country. For many rural and remote Western Australians, a university education is still too expensive and too far away. Providing higher education facilities in regional

areas will assist those areas to reverse the loss of population to university cities, for the students and their families (Deden, 2001).

Changing work patterns and lifestyles mean that people need ongoing education throughout their lives, they have a right to have access to higher education when they need it, and the right to choose the method of delivery that is most satisfactory for them. I would argue that there are three important questions at stake here. Employers increasingly expect their staff to be already skilled or willing to undertake training at their own cost. Governments expect workers to remain in the workforce longer, and older people are remaining healthy and active longer than ever before (Watson, *et al*, 2003).

Enormous progress has been made in the past two decades in widening access and equity but the momentum must be carried forward still if regional Western Australians are not to be left behind. Rural communities where there is little or no tradition of post-compulsory education must be given as much encouragement as possible to enable them to become learning regions, to build networks and to enhance their social and knowledge capital. The visible presence of higher education in their communities will give them opportunities to achieve sustainable learning centres, organisations and communities.

It is now urgent for all levels of government and localised industries and organisations to support the higher education system if regional communities are to have a fair and equitable chance of being active and able citizens, of belonging to and being competitive in the knowledge-based learning society (Garlick, 2000:10; OECD, 1996a). Their social cohesion, sustainable development and social capital depend on it. The ripple effects of providing higher education from individuals to

their regions and thence across regions to encompass the whole nation is well-documented and cannot, and should not, be disregarded (Sharp *et al*, 1986:68).

### **The case for regional higher education in Western Australia**

I have argued that there is still an important place for universities in modern society and that their prime functions are to gather and dispense knowledge, and to increase the social capital of their embedded communities. There would seem to be no case at all for not increasing the spread of higher education into regional and rural areas of Western Australia. Although there has been an increase in its delivery to some country areas of the State, there is a long way to go before it is readily available to everyone.

However, any plans for future expansion of higher education into regional Western Australia, if they are to be successful, must be in an environment of mutual respect and co-operation among all of the stakeholders. This means including all levels of government, large and small commercial organisations, community agencies and members of the community. Also, each region must be considered on its own merits, its identity and its needs. The social capital, history, geography and special characteristics of each region must be considered if its population, and the nation, are to benefit. To this end, I would argue that a State higher education commission is essential to the future of a fair and equitable system in WA, to be a central focus for current institutions to access expertise and resources, and to provide guidance and mentoring for new and evolving learning centres.

It is crucial to Australia's future development as a nation, that the crisis in higher education be resolved. Governments must understand that it is not a toy for successive administrations to play with but an essential building block of our society.

Nor is it a benefit that should be available to only those who can afford to pay for it. That would be an anachronism this country cannot afford to recreate. Only with the active participation of all stakeholders, will Australia have a world-class higher education system equitable and accessible to all who have the ability and the desire to take part in it. It is not sufficient for governments merely to devise policies. However, voicing the rhetoric will not suffice. There must be real mechanisms in place to ensure the policies are carried out efficiently, effectively, equitably and continuously.

Whatever changes are made to systems of higher education in the near future, they will no doubt revolutionise their structures, policies and procedures, both public and private. They will determine where and what kind of facilities will be established, and what study programmes will be delivered in them. Higher education institutions need to prepare current and future participants and their communities to manage, and to benefit from, the enormous changes occurring in Australia. We are part of an increasingly globalised world where national borders and economic systems seem to be blurring and, in some cases, disappearing (Dumetriu, 2000:5; Alasoini, 2001:4).

I believe that expanding the provision of higher education to all Australians, wherever they are located and whatever their socio-economic standing, will be a difficult but not impossible task for future governments. Economically, Australia is a wealthy country by world standards. It would be a crime if, through its reluctance to balance the marketplace with the need for social progress, it became an intellectually poor country and was left trailing behind by the knowledge economy.

## **Appendix**

This Appendix relates to chapter four and gives with some information about five of the regional campuses in this State in some detail. One of the campuses, Rockingham/Mandurah, while often referred to as regional is now included in the metropolitan area while the others are established in regional country centres. Two of those would be classified as in 'remote' areas in that they are more than five hundred kilometres from Perth.

### **Albany**

The Albany campus is an branch of the University of Western Australia. Its first programmes were launched in early 1999 with an initial intake of twenty-five undergraduate and fifteen postgraduate students (Orr, 2002:6 and <http://www.uwa.edu.au/media/statements/2000/06/2000619a.html>). In 2000, its expanded curriculum enabled students to undertake a “full first-year enrolment in twenty different degree programmes in five faculties” (Orr, 2002:6).

Unlike some other regional campuses in Western Australia, Albany is not part of a co-located campus with other institutions of the Great Southern Region. Originally it was located in the old, stone, colonial headmaster's cottage of Albany's first school. Due to the increase in numbers of students and the programmes offered it was relocated to the old Post Office, another heritage building overlooking the harbour and close to the centre of the city. The building was refurbished to accommodate the modern telecommunications systems required in keeping with the University's philosophy of combining the old with the new including the use of the iLecture system (Orr, 2002:7 and <http://ilectures.uwa.edu.au/>). Using these new technologies, the Centre is able to capitalise on flexible delivery modes that combine

online lectures, video-conferencing and the Internet with face-to-face tutorials and laboratory sessions. Grants from several Commonwealth and State Government departments and agencies have facilitated the establishment of a Natural Resource Management Centre of Excellence and a Masters programme of study in this field (Orr, 2002:14).

“Initially, first year units in Anthropology, English, Computer Science, Biology and Chemistry were offered in a mix of locally-based and video-linked course work,” (<http://www.uwa.edu.au/media/statements/1998/11/19981121.html>). Subsequently, available courses have expanded to include undergraduate units in arts, business, science (including agriculture and computing), education, and postgraduate (Masters) courses in education, science (natural resource management) and regional development (<http://www.albany.uwa.edu.au/index.html>). A new course will run in 2006 - Bachelor of Science (Restoration Ecology) Many of these courses are delivered electronically but tutorial groups are small, allowing students to meet with their tutors and colleagues each week. “This makes the transition to University life a much less traumatic experience for country students than it has often been in the past,” (UWA Handbook 2004:100) and students are able to benefit from the “social nature of teaching and learning” (McInnis, 1995:6). Unpublished data for 2004 lists the student body as fifty undergraduates and fifty postgraduates.

The low participation rates of school leavers at the campus have not improved significantly to date, but this may come as the Centre becomes more established and familiar in the Region (Orr, 2002:3). A factor contributing to the low participation rate of school leavers is that they may not be residents of Albany itself, but of other towns and communities within the Region. This, again, necessitates moving in to Albany and involves separate living expenses beyond the capacity of

many of the prospective students and their families (Orr, 2002:9). If students must move to attend university anyway then often they prefer to move to a larger city where they believe there are more opportunities for entertainment and student services, cultural venues and networks are well established and available to them (Orr, 2002:10).

#### *Co-operation with the community*

The Albany campus has a growing of visiting speakers programme that is well attended by members of the community. The Centre also runs a successful summer school similar to those presented as does its parent campus. In 2006 this included two units in natural resource management: aquatic biology and systematics and biodiversity. The statistics for the first three years of the Albany Centre's operation (Orr, 2002:8) show a higher proportion of mature age and female students than for its Perth-based home campus. This is perhaps an indication that regional institutions provide opportunities for groups of students who would not otherwise be able to attend university, either as undergraduates undertaking studies for the first time or for postgraduate opportunities for whom travel to the city would be impracticable because of work or family commitments.

#### **Broome**

The University of Notre Dame (UNDA) is Australia's first Catholic university, one of three private higher education institutions in Australia. It is a new and quite small university even by Australian standards, having been established in 1990 with the first Broome students enrolled in 1995 (DEST, 2003). The Broome centre is 2,600 kilometres north of its main campus in Fremantle and so is classified as 'remote' in the Kimberley Region. The Broome campus offers both undergraduate

and postgraduate programmes. They include Arts (including an Aboriginal Studies major), Business, Nursing, Counselling and Education as well as vocational education and training (VET) certificate and diploma courses. All students at UNDA study ethics, theology and philosophy. The Broome campus particularly places great emphasis on reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and operates a groundbreaking programme via the Internet to offer “remote and isolated Aboriginal students to access pre-university courses” as well as providing support for Kimberley communities (UNDA, 2002). The Broome campus serves the whole Kimberley Region, one-sixth of the State’s land mass with a population in 2004 of little over 35,000 making it one of the most sparsely populated regions in Australia (RDCWA, 2001).

For Indigenous rural students, access to a university campus has been even more problematic than for non-Indigenous isolated students (Alston, 1999:4). The establishment of the Broome campus addresses this issue not only for the Kimberley Region but also for students in other remote and isolated areas in Western Australia who have access to the Internet. This is through an “extension of the existing VET Pathways Program” (UNDA, 2002). All students who study via on-line also attend on-campus for “intensive study blocks” to gain the benefit of face-to-face contact with lecturers, tutors and other students (UNDA, 2002). This gives them the advantage of experiencing university life, learning study skills and a sense of ‘belonging to the campus.’ It also provides student accommodation and other support services.

Sixty-three students graduated in Broome in 2003, twenty-two of whom were in higher education including the second Bachelor of Nursing group and forty-one students completed Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications

(<http://web.nd.edu.au/broome/news/pathways/2003-10/>). Although a private university, Notre Dame does receive “Commonwealth Government funding through the Higher Education Funding Act and is therefore able to offer students access to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) funded student places. Postgraduate Australian students may access the Postgraduate Education Loans Scheme (PELS),” (2003, <http://web.nd.edu.au/broome/>).

### *Community partnerships*

The Broome campus is providing regional higher education and close to home access for students. Its strong focus on Aboriginal programmes and reconciliation is enhancing cross-cultural awareness and community connections and empowering Indigenous Australians. The Pathways On-Line Programme is funded and operated through a partnership between the Broome campus and Argyle Diamonds (UNDA, 2002). The Kailis Family and the Commonwealth Government (from capital grant funds) jointly funded the new Broome university campus library. It was opened in time for the beginning of the 2004 study year (UNDA, 2002). Edith Cowan University also shares space at the campus to deliver courses in indigenous studies and its Academy for Performing Arts Certificate III in Theatre (Aboriginal), for students in the region (ECU, 2000:64).

### **Bunbury**

The Edith Cowan University (ECU) campus in Bunbury was established in 1985 and began its first classes in 1986. Undergraduate and postgraduate courses are offered including computer technology, nursing, education, social work, surf science and wine and tourism. Through Kurongkurl Katatjin, Bunbury provides bridging and

undergraduate courses and support for indigenous students including Bachelor of Social Science (Indigenous Studies).

It is not a co-located campus as are Rockingham and Esperance, where the TAFE and other training facilities share the same site. It is, however, geographically positioned between the large separate campuses of the South West Regional College of TAFE and the South West Regional Health Campus. This allows for close co-operation and mutual benefit, the sharing of resources such as childcare at SWRC and the development of hospital and student housing (ECU, 1998:27). The Bunbury ECU is still quite small with less than a thousand students - 1.4% of the region's population - 81% of whom remained in their 'home region' (Garlick, 2000, 54 and DLGRD, 2003). As in other small regional learning centres, the students benefit from small class sizes and closer interaction between students and staff.

Bunbury ECU is one of the oldest regional university campuses in Western Australia and located 200 kilometres south of Perth so is regional but not remote. It has a strong commitment to, and relationship with, its embedded community with a catchment population (South West Region) of 123,000, being the most densely populated non-metropolitan regional area the State (Garlick, 2000:73 and DLGRD, 2003:29).

*Benefits to the community — social, economic*

The ECU Bunbury campus is an integral part of the South West Region, with which it has forged strong links in its first fifteen years. It has a strong engagement with its embedded community and this has had a positive effect on the region's social and economic capital, providing direct and indirect employment and financial input (Garlick, 2000). The new student housing project completed in 2002 at a cost

of \$2.7 million has provided for student accommodation on campus and student support facilities and amenities include multimedia iMac and computing labs, a bookshop, a study skills centre, medical and counselling services (<http://southwest.ecu.edu.au/campus/dr.html>, and <http://www.cowan.edu.au/links/about/>). The campus has established partnerships with training hospitals and an aged care service in the region to facilitate both the practical and theoretical aspects of professional health courses and provides those organisations with qualified staff.

The Faculty of Regional Professional Studies was initiated in 2002 as a result of a commercial partnership between the South West community and Alcoa (ECU, 2002:2). The Bunbury campus of ECU also administers small facilities in the regional towns of Collie, Manjimup and Margaret River. The Tapestry Tourism Futures Project began in April 2003 to research sustainable tourism development in the Region, with six of the local regional shires working together with the South West Regional Development Commission, the State Government. The first phase involved a computer model developed jointly with the CSIRO, the Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) for Sustainable Tourism and Murdoch University. The campus also runs a series of free public lectures on a variety of subjects for the community (<http://southwest.ecu.edu.au/centre/news/tapestry.html>), [last accessed 7/02/2004].

### **Kalgoorlie/Esperance**

The Curtin University campus in Kalgoorlie was established in 1996. It incorporates the Curtin Vocational Education and Training Centre and the Western Australian School of Mines. The latter was established in 1902 as a stand-alone tertiary institution a decade before the University of Western Australia opened its doors. Kalgoorlie campus is a co-located institution combining Curtin University of

Technology, the WA School of Mines, Curtin VTEC (the vocational training sector), the Eastern Goldfields Senior High School, The Centre for the Management of Arid Environments (CMAE) and Curtin Training Solutions (CTS). The campus also provides a distance-learning facility to enable students to study courses from both Curtin and the Centre for Regional Education (DLGRD, 2003 and 2004, <http://www.wasm.curtin.edu.au/msie.html>).

Curtin in Kalgoorlie offers teaching and research programmes of direct relevance to the mining and mineral processing industries of the region through a comprehensive range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in geology, mining, metallurgy, environmental and other engineering disciplines as well as courses in Indigenous studies and others (SCPIRS, 200:276, <http://www.ecc.wa.edu.au/> and <http://www.wasm.curtin.edu.au/msie.html>). Both Curtin and ECU universities have collaborated with the Goldfields-Esperance Regional Development Commission in setting up a mobile computing room which will visit the smaller towns and centres in the region to give them access to online training programs and government information (Curtin, 2002:6).

The Goldfields-Esperance Region has a population of approximately 60,000, and occupies a landmass of almost one third of Western Australia. Kalgoorlie is six hundred kilometres east of Perth so is classified as a remote centre. Eighty per cent of its income is derived from gold and other mineral resource extraction, processing and export (GEDC, 1999:1 and NOIE, 2004).

Esperance Community College is a co-located campus on the south coast, providing tertiary and vocational education. It was set up through a community-wide partnership including funding from the Federal, State and Local Governments, the local Rotary Clubs. The Kalgoorlie campus also administers the Curtin (CTS)

section of the Esperance College, which includes the Senior High School, the vocational education and training sector (Curtin VTEC), the University, a residential college and community teaching and learning (<http://www.ecc.wa.edu.au/>, 2004).

A skills audit was conducted in 1998 for the Esperance Region, to assist the College in targeting the community's education and training needs. It has since been extended to include the whole Goldfields-Esperance Region (DES, 1999:3). At Esperance Community College, students can access courses from both Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities through the Centre of Further and Higher Education (COFHE) from associate degree to PhD level (2004, <http://consultancy.curtin.edu.au/ctsvtec.html> and [http://www.regional.wa.gov.au/perspectives/goldfields\\_esperance/infrastructure.asp](http://www.regional.wa.gov.au/perspectives/goldfields_esperance/infrastructure.asp)).

A combined Open Learning Centre and Library Resource Centre was established and, like the libraries in Albany and the Rockingham campus, has been extended and upgraded to cater for the university, other education institutions and the wider community (Murray, 1999:2).

Esperance is a Southern Ocean port 725 kilometres south east of Perth with a population of approximately 13,000. Its main industries are fishing, agriculture and tourism. The port also exports minerals from mines in the Goldfields Region including Ravensthorpe and Kalgoorlie.

#### *Co-operation with the community and community programmes*

The Esperance Marine Institute was formed by a consortium which included the Esperance Community College. It focuses on temperate marine aquaculture and environmental research, training and education (<http://www.ecc.wa.edu.au/>, 2004). The Esperance Community Mentoring Project was established in 2000. This was a

very successful pilot programme designed to support higher students in regional Western Australia providing mentoring by community members, the Goldfields-Esperance Development Commission, the Department of Commerce and Trade, the Esperance Community College and the Esperance Chamber of Commerce (Barrett, 2003:1). It was jointly funded by the College, Curtin University, the Department of Local Government and Regional Development and DETYA and has proved to be very successful in providing support and improving retention rates for remote and isolated students (Barrett, 2003:1).

### **Rockingham and (Peel) Mandurah**

The information about these two small campuses is included here though they are not ‘regional’ in the sense that they are country. Until the last few years the Peel/Mandurah area was included in the South West Region, the main administrative centre of which is Bunbury. Rockingham also was an outer urban area adjacent to Perth’s main industrial centres. They are now considered to be in the South West Urban Corridor. I have included them as they suffer from the same low participation and retention rates as do the other regional centres. The campuses were established after consultation in the early 1990s with the various local councils and State and Federal governments in an endeavour to increase access and participation in the region and to serve the local communities and industries. Each is marketed separately to its anticipated student groups and communities.

The Murdoch University site at Rockingham is twenty-five kilometres from its main campus and a further twenty kilometres from the centre of Perth. The campus accepted its first students in 1996 and has a “dedicated faculty of engineering” which serves the adjacent heavy industrial area. It also has an arts and commerce building and the community library already mentioned

<http://www.murdoch.edu.au/index/visitors/rockingham>). Together, the two campuses provide education and training from certificate-level vocational courses through Challenger TAFE to advanced postgraduate research degrees in a range of courses at the Murdoch University campus. The Challenger TAFE Rockingham campus was originally the South West Metropolitan College of TAFE and was established in 1980 to provide vocational education and training to the area. The two “institutions remain autonomous and independent” while sharing resources and amenities and working together to provide a comprehensive range of subjects to their students and to the community (Marshall, 1997:17).

In the 2001 ABS census listed Rockingham and Kwinana as the two Perth urban areas with the “highest proportion of tradespersons and related workers at over eighteen per cent and the highest number of those employed in manufacturing as nineteen per cent.” The same two areas also had the highest unemployment figures for the Perth Metropolitan Area.

The smaller combined campus included in this section, the Peel Regional campus is a co-located site including Murdoch University, Challenger TAFE and Mandurah Senior College. It is a further thirty kilometres to the south of Rockingham. Both the Rockingham and Mandurah campuses serve the Kwinana, Rockingham, Mandurah and Murray districts. In 1996 these areas had a combined catchment population in excess of 143,000 including a well-established industrial corridor, several heavy engineering works, a naval base and a grain terminal (Marshall, 1997:3). As with the Rockingham campus, each sector of the Peel (Mandurah) campus retains its distinct identity and autonomy. It provides teaching and learning programmes that are relevant to the industries in its embedded community, for example, tourism and hospitality subjects due to the strong tourism

focus in the area. The two centres have video and electronic communications links with their parent campus at Murdoch.

## Glossary

**Behavioural public economics:** assumes that individuals are rational beings who will make choices that are beneficial to them. The theory is that people can be influenced to make decisions that are against their best interests by government economic policies designed to limit the choices individuals can make. This is particularly evident in the non-welfarist policies of neoliberal governments and in the provision or non-provision of public goods. For example, individuals receiving welfare payments must act in a certain way or lose their entitlements. Also governments raise or lower personal and/or company tax rates to affect levels of spending or saving in the economy that they assert are for the public good (Kanbur *et al.*, 2004:3)

**Binary system:** following the Martin Report in 1965, higher education was stratified into two levels, universities as one and colleges of advanced education and institutes of technology as the other. Abolished in 1988 in favour of a 'unified national system'

**CAE (Colleges of Advanced Education):** these were the 'second string' of higher education in the binary education system in Australia (similarly in the UK and Germany). They were deemed to provide more training and vocational for professions such as teaching, nursing, and 'applied science' as opposed to 'real science' Little if any research was carried out and, if so, was 'applied research.' They did award bachelor and masters degrees but "their courses had to be accredited by state-appointed panels" unlike universities which were self-accrediting (Moses, 2004:1)

**Communities of practice:** the term was first used in relation to situated learning in a co-located setting, for example an organisation. Now more widely used to describe informal groups with a common interest and sense of identity who collaborate and share their knowledge, perceptions, experiences and goals (Kimble *et al.*, 2001:5)

**Corporate settlement:** refers to the neoliberal system of 'marketising' all organisations and institutions into corporate enterprises which are then governed by supply and demand and business and commercial monetary and management policies. This is particularly so in Australia with higher education, health and welfare.

**Corporatism:** "contemporary popular usage of the term is more pejorative, emphasizing the role of business corporations in government decision-making at the expense of the public. The power of business to affect government legislation through lobbying and other avenues of influence in order to promote their interests is usually seen as detrimental to those of the public. In this respect, corporatism may be characterized as an extreme form of regulatory capture (Katzenstein, 1985.)

**Critical policy analysis:** interpretation, evaluation and review methodology used to examine and challenge the dominant rational paradigm, usually government policies, for example those which affect particular minority groups

**Cultural capital:** a form of capital that "critiques neoliberal functions which produce and reproduce structural inequalities in society" (Bourdieu, 1986:243-248 and Fitzsimmons, 2000:10)

**Distance education:** systems of delivering education to students remote from classrooms, using postal, online, telephone, videoconferencing or other methods. Originally provided for primary school children, but now all levels of education from elementary to postgraduate, from kindergarten to the University of the Third Age.

**Dominant rational paradigm:** the neoliberal theory that the market should determine the provision of all goods and services and considered the only possible answer (McChesney, 1997:5)

**Economic rationalism:** generally regarded as an economic policy where the market rules and social or moral consideration has no role to play. It is a term that came in to use in Australia during the 1980s, particularly in the Whitlam era. In the United Kingdom the term Thatcherism was used in much the same way and Rogernomics in New Zealand. It has become synonymous with neoliberalism (Quiggin, 1997:3-12).

**Education policy:** the vehicle used by governments to administer and change public expectations of education. It is the set of written and implicit regulations and practices which govern operation of and behaviour in education institutions

**Embedded community:** is the locality or space in which a university is situated, including the cultural, political and social traditions and values that it shares with the community surrounding and served by it.

**Equity and accessibility:** the theory that all individuals should be treated equally and have equal rights and access to facilities and services which require to sustain quality of life. This theory raises questions of 'who pays' and 'who benefits' where limited public funds are available for welfare, health and education

**External education:** a system of undertaking university or other studies without attending classes, usually but not always by distance education methods of delivery and usually but not always by students who reside at a distance from the institution

**Globalisation:** a recent 'world order' where borders between nation states are considered to be eroding due to global competition, modern monetary processes. Considered to be a construction by powerful nations and corporations to subvert or subjugate those that are smaller and less powerful

**HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme):** implemented in January 1989, where initially, students contributed approximately one-fifth of the cost of their undergraduate tuition (Marginson, *Markets in Education*, 1997:220-257). This level of costs to students is continuing to increase following implementation of the *Crossroads* Review of Higher Education

**Higher education:** is one among many terms used in different ways to refer to some part or the whole of education beyond basic primary and secondary education. Used here to refer to university education.

**Human capital:** "the time, experience and abilities of an individual, household or generation which can be used in the production process" (Husz, 1998:9)

**Human capital theory:** in education is sometimes referred to as the economics of education as it relates to expenditure (Husz, 1998:9). Also, "education is an investment that produces benefits in the future. Recent cuts in education spending will therefore reduce future national income" (Quiggin, 1999:1)

**Individualised learning:** a term used to describe flexible, self-paced learning using different teaching and learning strategies and media (*Crossroads An Overview Paper*, 2002:19, section 95).

**Intellectual capital:** the neoliberal view that it is “intellectual material – knowledge, information, intellectual property, experience – that can be put to use to create wealth” (Stewart, 1998)

**Internationalisation:** a ‘world order’ emphasis of strategies of richer nation states to ameliorate or exploit the inequalities of the poorer nations. It is now more commonly applied to higher education, its value as an export industry and international students (Scott, 2000: 1)

**Knowledge capital:** the accumulated and acquired skills and experience gained by a student, employee or community they can then use to increase their financial wealth

**Knowledge economy:** an environment in which the creation and utilization of knowledge have become the dominant paradigm (Macintyre, 2002:145)

**Knowledge good:** most commonly used now to refer to intellectual capital, copyright, patents, trademarks, etc. Also refers to the use of modern technologies that produce and distribute knowledge.

**Knowledge society:** the idea that a society with greater and more widely distributed knowledge will be more affluent. It assumes that knowledge has a monetary value that is essential to modern societies.

**Learning centre:** a venue for teaching and learning, either formally or informally, usually but not always in a small population centre which could not support an established campus

**Learning community:** can be a learning region or centre, a community of individuals with shared values, working towards increasing knowledge and achieving joint goals

**Learning region:** the term is interchangeable with learning community above and usually refers to a geographical area where individuals and organisations work together to increase their knowledge, social and cultural capital

**Lifelong learning:** is the concept that to exist comfortably in this changing world it is necessary to continue to learn throughout life. New skills and knowledge are now required for work, leisure and other social activities.

**Macro level:** social theories and explanations about broad-scope aspects of social reality, such as social change in higher education in the whole nation or state (Neumann, 2000:513)

**Micro level:** social theories and explanations about the small-scale and narrow level of reality of small groups (see Neumann, 2000:513)

**Neoliberalism:** is usually defined as a set of economic policies which advocate free trade, free enterprise, privatisation, the abolition or reduction of government intervention, and a denial of the social contract. In Australia is usually defined as economic rationalism (Pusey, 1991 and McChesney, 1999:7-12)

**Non-welfarist optimal taxation:** government inducements through taxation or subsidies to compel particular behavioural changes (Kanbur *et al*, 2004:3)

**Policy as action:** the concept that governments use policy to change the attitudes, beliefs and activities of individuals and societies, for example raising the cost of higher education to reduce the number of students and therefore the cost to the economy

**Policy as a context:** the environment in which policies are written. The view that they are not nor can be value-neutral (Taylor *et al*, 1997:15)

**Policy as private good:** the neoliberal notion that the state is not responsible for facilities such as welfare, health and education, moving to a ‘user pays’ system in the belief that the ‘user’ benefits

**Policy as process:** “policy is about *intentions* and *actions* that involve promoting *values* with the objective of *creating change* in social settings” (Taylor *et al*, 1997:24)

**Policy as text:** is the idea of policy as it is written (usually by bodies of authority such as government departments) and read by the ‘clients’ (in this case higher education staff, students and communities)

**Positional good:** a level of higher education that provides a client, in this case university student, “with an advantage in competition for employment, income, social standing and prestige” (Marginson in Smyth, 1995:17)

**Public good:** defined as goods, for example higher education, which are unable to be produced on a market basis because consumption by one person does not harm another (non-rivalry) and non-users could not be excluded from the benefits of consumption (non-excludability) (Samuelson, 1954:387-389)

**Qualitative data:** information collected in the form of words, pictures, sounds, visual images or objects (Neumann, 2000:517)

**Regional campus:** in this work the term refers to campuses that are outside of Perth, so do not include those of Rockingham and Mandurah which are now included by the State governing bodies as being within the Metropolitan Area

**Remote:** those communities in Western Australia that are situated further than 500 kilometres from the centre of Perth

**Rural:** those communities that are outside the Perth Metropolitan Area but less than 500 kilometres from Perth

**Social capital:** the networks, values and trust present in a community that make possible it possible for its individuals to work together for their mutual benefit. It is a resource that is both used and developed in learning centres and regions (Hanifan, 1916 and Putnam, 1995)

**Social contract:** a philosophy at least as old as from the time of Socrates, it implies a real or hypothetical agreement between governments and their citizens that all have certain rights and responsibilities. For example, in return for abiding by the government’s laws and paying due taxes individuals have the right to expect certain services and facilities in return, such as welfare, health and education

**Social justice:** an idea of society where all citizens are treated equally according to law and have equal access to health, education, welfare and security

**Stakeholder:** a person or group that has an investment, share, or interest in something, as in the planning, funding and operation of a university, a learning community or a business

**Study centre:** for the purposes of this work, a study centre is deemed to be a learning centre in a regional or remote community

**TAFE (Technical and Further Education):** post-secondary education provided in Australia, usually vocational and trades-related

**Tertiary education:** a generic term for post-compulsory education which includes but is not exclusive to universities, technical and other colleges, TAFE and adult education

**Value-neutral:** the idea that any research, policy or government decision can be made in a totally objective and unbiased way without contamination by the values and beliefs of the researchers, policy-makers or government bodies concerned

**Welfarism:** usually associated with the economic conception of welfare and based on the premise that actions, policies, and/or rules should be evaluated on the basis of their consequences or impacts on human welfare (see Shavell and Kaplow, *Fairness versus Welfare*, 2002)

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