

**Education for the Future: Responses to the New Zealand
Productivity Commission *New models of tertiary education*
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**Ralph Bathurst, Angela Feekery, Jane Parker, and Sean Phelan
Massey Business School**

In making this response to the Productivity Commission's discussion document, *New models of tertiary education Issues Paper*, we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback. In the submission, we focus on issues that are relevant to the immediate context within which we work (a university business school), but we also reflect on the general condition of the university today.

While implicitly representing our colleagues, we are mindful of the short time-frame for this process and that, given more time for collective dialogue and debate, our responses would be richer and more finely nuanced.

To that end, therefore, we urge the Commission to be less driven by defined outcomes and to be more focused on learning the needs and abilities of all the contributing groups, interests and perspectives within the sector. We further note that the commentary and

data contained in the paper are largely oriented around quantifiable economic measures, and the general assumption that the work done on universities is measurable. This assumption misses the complex social, political, cultural, and ethical factors that underpin the work of a university in its research, teaching and service mandate, many of which escape the logic of measurement. We also note that there is very little mention of the Education Act (1989) especially the provisions that emphasise the responsibility of universities and academics to act as the critic and conscience of society (Education Act, 1989, Section (4)(v)). Therefore, the discussion document rests on a very one-dimensional understanding of the wider dynamic environment within which education is conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our response focuses on broad themes and specific issues addressed in the document, and reflects on our responsibilities and functions within the sector. We situate a number of the specific questions raised by the Productivity Commission within a wider narrative and social context.

Vocational Training

While we applaud the broad orientation in the discussion document towards students becoming work-ready, we consider a skills-based education that heavily focuses on

immediate employability to be limited and short-termist. Workplaces require graduates who are, first and foremost, informed, flexible and critical thinkers. Given the changing nature of work, the disappearance and the emergence of new jobs, alongside the recalibration of existing jobs, the future demands on workers will continually change (see for example, Kubiak, Ballingall, Dean, Destremau, & Drew, 2015). What will remain constant, however, are the intellectual demands on the workforce to rethink their processes and practices. To that end, we believe that students must have exposure in the university context to a full range of learning experiences including research capabilities, critical inquiry and rhetorical acuity. Anything less fails to do justice to the historical and legislative remit of the university. And it would fail on narrow productivity grounds, because of its inability to grasp the attributes needed in the workplace of the future.

Some competencies can be acquired through systematic training whilst others develop because the groundwork for conceptual, critical and innovative thinking has been laid through the educational process (Paul & Elder, 2009). We would suggest that tertiary education institutions (TEIs) including universities, need to work in tandem with other societal stakeholders (such as the business sector) to ensure that the *portion* of student learning that is oriented towards workplace considerations are balanced by the provision of adequate, quality and decent jobs, career opportunities and workplace

operations. As in other countries, all partners with a vested interest in enriching Aotearoa New Zealand's education models need to ensure a closer match than is currently the case between skill set provision and its utilisation in the workplace (see World Economic Forum, 2014).

Business Model

While we acknowledge that the Productivity Commission privileges a "business model" lens, we insist that mass education which explores a generalized curriculum will not meet the kind of work-readiness needs that the document advocates. Furthermore, we would maintain that using international rankings as a key measure of reputation is a problematic device, which simply inscribes the logic of measurement that we questioned earlier. League tables and ranking mechanisms are open to manipulation and do not adequately reflect the unique or full contribution that universities in Aotearoa New Zealand can make to our global and national communities.

To that end, we believe that each institution has its unique identity and strengths, and that these values inculcate learning experiences that help students differentiate themselves. To illustrate, Massey University, including Massey Business School, engages in various modes of teaching. Distance teaching informs the learning

experience of some but not all students, in a manner that suits both their dynamic circumstances and the institution's resource-based competitive advantages. The acquisition of the latter has occurred and matured over time, and successfully functions in careful balance with other tranches and forms of teaching, research and service activities.

Furthermore, the variety that results from these strengths contributes to developing social diversity, an area in which Aotearoa New Zealand has excelled. Such diversity encourages engagement and interactions across disciplines, building collaborative environments that ultimately bring social, political, ethical, cultural and economic benefits.

We note that the paper culminates with a summary of new models for education. We think that the categorisations used conflate a number of (essentially, business) models with componentry from those models. We would thus prefer to see a consideration of an array of models (business, social, other) of similar stature, so as to ensure recognition of approaches that encompass a wide range of standpoints.

Teaching and Learning

We think the proposal to potentially split institutions into either teaching or research facilities will have retrogressive consequences. Knowledge acquisition is a dynamic process where research and teaching – like students and teachers – inform each other. No single activity has merit in and of itself; rather, learning and scholarship develops through their dynamic interactions. Therefore, to split functions into different institutions would impact the quality of both teaching and research detrimentally, meaning that learners, and ultimately society, would suffer.

We are concerned about the siloed nature of PBRF as a measure of research performance and the relative lack of value placed on teaching and learning scholarship that will enhance teaching capability and excellence. Thus, we anticipate a higher value placed on interdisciplinary dialogue that will enhance the teaching and learning experiences of students.

We do see virtue in equipping faculty members to be excellent teachers. However, to disproportionately reward educators who develop so-called ‘innovative’ programmes based on digital communication technologies carried out at a distance from the learner is short sighted. We think that embodied teaching and learning in classrooms where

students are physically present will continue to be the preferred means of teaching and learning, with distance learning complementing this mode of education. A number of the social benefits of this process are non-economic in nature, highlighting the need for process and outcome measures that are both qualitative and quantitative in character.

As suggested above, while we support universities forming solid relationships with business sectors, and other social institutions and actors, we note that these relationships are often framed according to a uni-directional model, where scholars make approaches to industry for purposeful engagement. However, the reverse is rare with the business sector being less active in seeking partnerships with tertiary institutions. We suggest that business–university relationships are more egalitarian where the interactions occur *both* ways.

Export Education

Aotearoa New Zealand has a growing reputation as a quality provider for international students. For most of these students, English is not their native tongue, and they come from educational systems that have not equipped them well for independent critical thought. Our business schools receive the majority of these students and we have an obligation to educate them with the distinct competencies that we possess. Therefore,

while international students do bring considerable economic benefits to universities, we resist the urge to commodify this relationship. These international students are our fellow citizens in an increasingly globalised world.

Greater consideration needs to be given to ensuring the 'readiness' of international students for tertiary level education in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, TEIs, the State and other parties need to work much more closely with prospective students on providing for their language and cognitive development so that students attain a suitable standard prior to embarking on tertiary study here.

Conclusions

The notion of life-long learning implies that specific technical skills may be acquired on the job, when people enter new positions. Our role as a university, and within that setting as a business school, is to offer students a comprehensive education that enables them to participate in the changing face of work without suffering the unintended consequences of those changes. A tailored, rather than blanket, framework of educational models that recognises the diversity of student, society and labour market needs, as well as the multiple functions of universities within that system, is thus required. We would assert that such a framework will require significant and ongoing

input from all relevant parties – and crucially, a vision that transcends a narrow focus on economic productivity.

References

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