

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Victoria University of Wellington is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the New Zealand Productivity Commission issues paper *New Models of Tertiary Education* (NMTE, February 2016). The Faculty as a whole was asked for input and this response derives from a working group convened by Pro-Vice Chancellor and Dean, Professor Jennifer Windsor. It consisted of academic staff from the Schools of: Music; Film, English & Media Studies; Linguistics & Applied Language Studies; History, Philosophy, Political Science & International Relations. In addition, there was a representative of the Faculty professional staff and the Faculty student body. In this response, we focus mainly on trending opportunities and challenges raised in NMTE (Q46) which we believe Humanities and Social Sciences, including the creative arts (HSS) can speak to most directly.

General response

We begin by acknowledging the thought and work behind NMTE and by welcoming this chance to take stock of tertiary education in New Zealand. We do unequivocally reject the assertion in the Terms of Reference that there is “considerable inertia” in the university sector compared to other countries [Q59]. Much as those outside the banking sector may perceive this sector to be fundamentally unaltered from a medieval, Venetian model, we appreciate that those outside the day-to-day life of universities may perceive that universities have not changed from models familiar to medieval scholars. But this speaks in both instances to imperfect perspective from a distance. Within the HSS in New Zealand there is substantial everyday innovation to incorporate and leverage changes in technology, internationalisation, and a focus on non-cognitive/soft skills and employability. This can be seen in current teaching of undergraduates and post-graduates (whose needs and interests are less evident in NMTE) and in the ways in which teaching and research are inextricably linked. Australia’s Chief Scientist recently applauded the Australian Humanities and Social Sciences sector for “significant development, modernisation and internationalisation” and “dramatic” increases in productivity (Chubb, 2014). Our experiences in New Zealand march closely alongside our Australian colleagues.

Day-to-day innovation, whether it be in teaching, technology, entrepreneurial opportunities or experiential learning, etc. is alive and well in New Zealand universities. However, as noted in NMTE, implementing large-scale change typically involves careful consideration of the impact on students as well as on performance measures such as course and qualification completion. The content and timing of experimentation and changes is balanced with the need to ensure programme quality and consistency for fee-paying students who enrol under a particular set of expectations about the degree experience and outcomes. Government regulations, especially those focused on quality assurance, provide some of this balance but also constrain the speed of innovation [Q67]. Further, universities have needed to build administrative architectures to navigate regulatory processes, which may foster a greater emphasis on compliance than innovation. Universities also have an incentive to follow funding, avoid penalties and compete with each other, with relatively little financial incentive in the sector for experimentation within a university or larger-scale initiatives as members of cross-university consortia. These may all be potential barriers to innovation [Q72].

Trending Challenges and Opportunities

There are several trends in models of teaching and research that provide challenges and opportunities for the HSS. Foremost among these is the widely acknowledged need for students to emerge from university with intellectual breadth and creativity that fosters societal and civic growth and that also meets employer

expectations [Q32]. That the HSS provide a critical context for innovation and preparing future leaders is increasingly being recognised. Several position papers point to the need for enhancing integration of the STEM and HSS fields, noting that the potential of STEM can only be realised with strong central government support for the knowledge and insights garnered through HSS [Q39] (Turner & Brass, 2014). Similarly, universities in China and some other Asian countries now emphasise creativity rather than over-specialised learning to spur the knowledge economy and international competitiveness. This already has begun to reposition the HSS (or liberal arts) as fundamental to innovation, productivity and entrepreneurship as well as a thriving civil society. We argue that, in this respect, New Zealand's relative isolation can be cast as an asset: students work closely particularly in teams with their teachers developing these sorts of skills alongside subject-area knowledge.

A second trend, the move toward online technologies and competency based models may also open up new educational products and markets. We see this as another area of opportunity for well-supported HSS offerings. There is a need for a coherent approach to nurturing critical thinking and multiple perspectives in competency based education and disruptive innovation – and this is the hallmark of HSS education. We note, however, that competency based education faces its own challenges, e.g. it is not always targeted where it might have most impact and is not always cost-effective (Kelchen, 2015). To enhance innovation, the New Zealand tertiary education sector can learn from the pitfalls already known to early adopters. In particular, it would be a critical mistake for universities to separate educational products from their knowledge source or to separate productivity issues from the greater context of the needs of a civil society [Q32-33]. Universities foster ideas. They ask and answer questions. They are key players in the global knowledge economy, providing public and private goods (Warner 2015). The intersection of research and teaching, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, facilitates this development of human capital, and the world's great universities embed new teaching and learning practices in the latest research [Q11].

A third trend that has considerable traction in several countries is universities' move to interdisciplinary and community-engaged approaches to address the world's 'grand challenges' [Q46]. This move has highlighted the advantages of cross-university consortia to achieve impact and distribute risk. New Zealand has experimented with cross-institutional collaborations in the form of the Centres of Research Excellence. The HSS are inherently interdisciplinary, and such cross-institutional HSS collaborations in other countries have been shown to be high-impact, cost-effective and to achieve economies of scale [Q8]. As two examples, "Humanities Without Walls" (<http://www.humanitieswithoutwalls.illinois.edu/about.html>) bootstraps regional expertise of the very large midwestern universities in the United States into ambitious new projects which not only foster ideas and ingenuity, but also new ways of teaching and doing research. In Scotland, with a population comparable to New Zealand, innovative collaborations in doctoral research training have been facilitated by sharing expertise distributed across all the Scottish universities. The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science provides one such umbrella infrastructure (http://www.socsciscotland.ac.uk/about_sgsss/what_is_a_dtc). The particular regulatory environment of NZ tertiary education which requires direct competition between universities lessens the benefits of enhancing an ambitious and high impact environment for research in the HSS, where academic staff may be distributed in most or all of NZ's universities.

A fourth trend, the move to globalisation and cross-cultural competence, is particularly challenging in New Zealand because we lack clear pathways to and incentives for university-level language learning. Compared to other countries, only a very small number of New Zealand secondary school students learn an international or community language other than English or Māori. The Royal Society of New Zealand's assessment of the state of the nation (*Languages in Aotearoa New Zealand*: <http://www.royalsociety.org.nz/expert-advice/papers/yr2013/languages-in-aotearoa-new-zealand/>) revealed critical needs in the teaching of language and culture in NZ, and pointed to the benefits of a co-ordinated national languages strategy. We would add that proficiency in languages is a uniquely democratic access point for individuals and groups to create social and economic capital (see references in *The Economist*, by R.L.G. 2014, also Bourdieu 1986, Bialystok 2011, Holmes 2008, Keysar et al. 2012, and extensive research by François Grin).

Finally, in embracing innovation, we also know that universities play a highly significant role in national and international communities through their focus on the long term. The HSS in particular provide an educational platform that is central to how we imagine contributions to civil societies and the common good. If we focus only on immediate economic development and productivity, then we will not have a future that is informed by a critical understanding of the past.

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