Standards-based Accountability in Higher Education:

What's Happening in Australia?

Ontario Conference on Measuring the Value of a Postsecondary Education.

Toronto
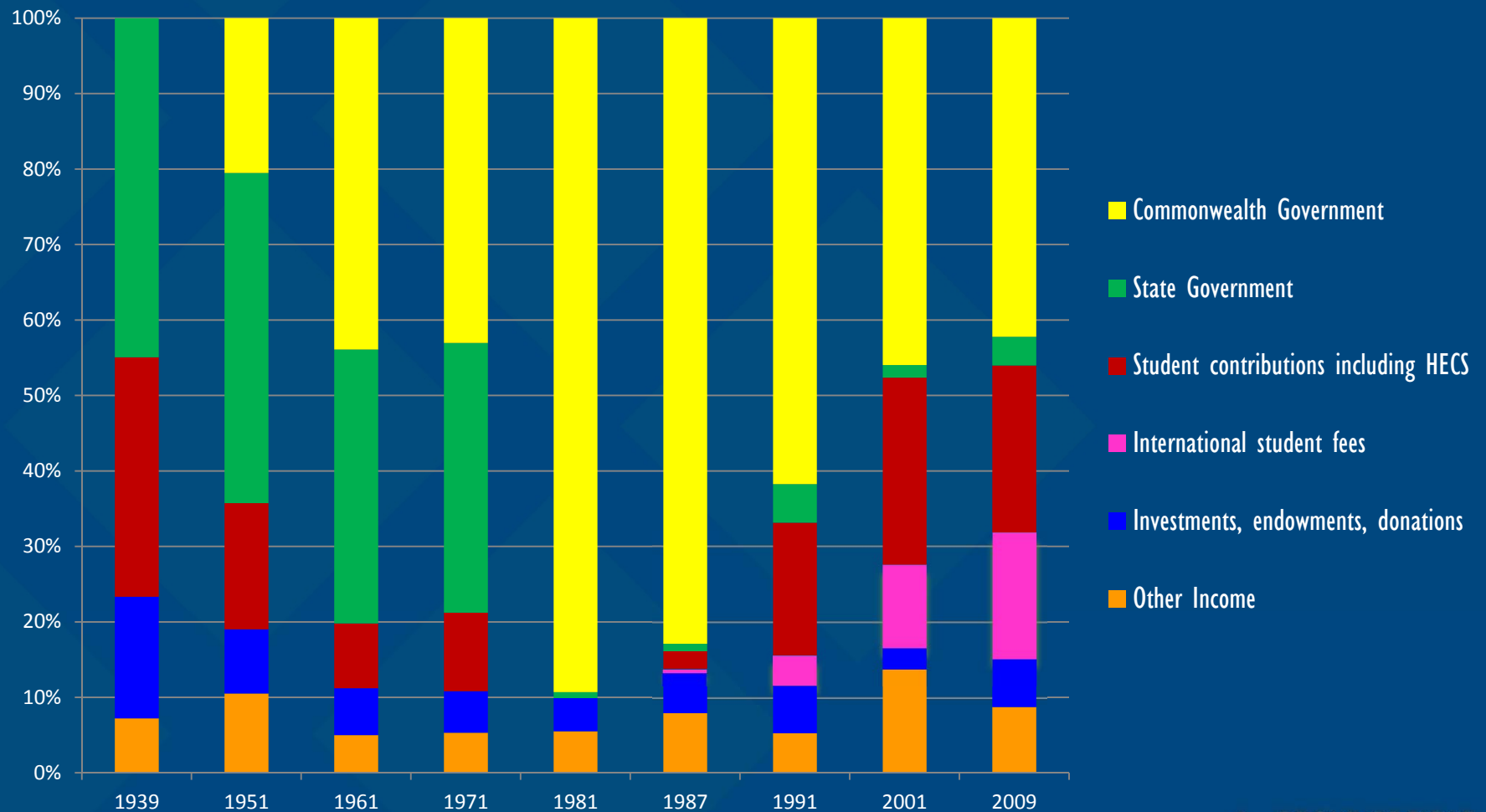*19-20 May, 2011*

Michael Gallagher

Executive Director

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Providers and Enrolments by sector of Tertiary Education, Australia, 2009

	Providers	Enrolments
Higher Education – Public	37	1, 058, 399
Higher Education – Private	78	76, 467
VET - Public	4, 400	1, 706, 700
VET - Private	3, 000	2, 200, 000

For Vocational Education & Training (VET), public = government-subsidised providers, including government-established institutions and private providers receiving government subsidies.
Figures for private providers and enrolments are 2006 estimates.

Higher Education Revenue by Source, Australia, 1939 to 2009

Higher Education Reform in Australia 2008 - 2012

1. Student-driven funding of higher education

2. Strengthening the Australian Qualifications Framework

3. Establishing a new national regulator - *the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency*

4. Developing mission-based funding compacts – including measures of student learning

5. Articulating academic standards

6. Assessing the quality of research

7. Increasing public information about performance.

Student-driven funding of Higher Education

➢ From 2012, universities will be funded by the Government for any number of students they choose to enrol in any accredited course at whatever entry standards they deem appropriate.

➢ Universities will be free to vary the enrolment mix by field of study in response to student demand.

➢ Enrolled students will be entitled to income-contingent loans to meet any gap between the cost of a place and the level of Government subsidy (fixed at a common rate by field of study for all universities).

➢ There are to be no time or dollar limits on the value of the student entitlement (to a subsidised place and a loan).

➢ The Government has de-controlled student volumes but continues to control prices – both those paid by the Government and by students

Strengthening the national qualifications framework

➢ The new AQF maps qualification types and titles to 10 'levels' each of which describe learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and application of knowledge and skills.

➢ The new AQF is stronger and more coherent than the previous version. It has shifted from a descriptive to a prescriptive framework and is more firmly part of the regulatory arrangements governing tertiary education in Australia.

➢ AQF specifications are to be reflected in the qualifications standards that higher education providers must meet in order to be accredited by the national regulator, TEQSA.

Establishing a new national regulator

➢ Core purpose is "to safeguard the quality of education provided, ensuring that it is not compromised as the sector expands".

➢ Result of negotiations has enshrined principles of regulatory necessity, risk and proportionality in TEQSA's objects and its decisions about registration and accreditation.

➢ Unreasonable actions of TEQSA will be appealable in the Federal Court and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

➢ TEQSA will have to take into account the diversity, missions, curriculum and approach to delivery of established universities.

➢ TEQSA will be obliged also to adopt an escalating approach to enforcement.

➢ The standards that TEQSA is to monitor and enforce are minimum acceptable (threshold) standards.

➢ The standards that may affect registration and accreditation are the provider and qualifications standards, and not the teaching and learning standards, research standards, information standards, or any other standards.

The new standards framework

- ➢ Provider registration standards

- ➢ Provider category standards

- ➢ Course accreditation standards

- ➢ Qualifications standards

- ➢ Teaching and Learning standards

- ➢ Research standards

- ➢ Information standards

- ➢ Other standards

Developing mission-based funding compacts with performance reporting

➢ 2011 'facilitation payment' for agreeing to performance targets

➢ From 2012, 'reward funding' for meeting targets

➢ Development & testing of 3 new performance measurement tools:

  o University Experience Survey

  o Collegiate Learning Assessment

  o a composite Teaching Quality Indicator

Articulating academic standards

➢ Formal statements of academic standards V direct assessment of learning outcomes

➢ Participation in AHELO (Engineering)

➢ ALTC Learning & Teaching Academic Standards Project

➢ TEQSA Teaching & Learning Standards

➢ TEQSA Research Standards

Assessing the quality of research

- ➢ Funding the indirect costs of research

- ➢ Transparent costing exercise

- ➢ ERA: research assessment exercise

- ➢ SRE: block funding for research infrastructure

- ➢ JRE: block funding for research engagement

- ➢ CRN: 'hub & spokes' funding of research capacity

- ➢ RTS: block funding for research training

Results of ERA 2010

- ➢ 65% of ERA assessments were rated at world standard or above (i.e. received 3s, 4s or 5s)

- ➢ Ratings of 4 and 5 were concentrated in 9 universities.

- ➢ A further 8 universities achieved a rating of 5 for just one 2-digit field.

- ➢ Five of Australia's current universities did not meet the criterion of world standard in at least 3 broad fields of research

Increasing public information about higher education capacity and performance

➢ MyUni website

　*program offerings
　*academic staffing
　*entry requirements
　*services & facilities

➢ Performance reporting

　* access equity
　* student progress
　* student engagement

The Accountability for Quality in Higher Education Agenda

Contemporary public policy focuses on

cost-effectively enlarging higher education access

   and success

through greater operating flexibility for institutions

   with stronger accountability for results and

   without diminution of quality

Purposes of the accountability for quality agenda

➢ To increase graduate output quantity and improve quality

➢ To make more transparent to the lay community what may be opaque and self-referenced judgements of academic teachers (e.g. grading student work, awarding credit for prior learning)

➢ To validate internal academic assessments against externally-set standards

Compelling grounds for a new approach

➢ The probity threshold
  – *ridding the system of low quality providers*

➢ The effectiveness imperative
  – *actually learning knowledge and skills*

➢ The transparency requirement
  – *making implicit judgements explicit*

➢ The comparability challenge
  – *understanding similarities & dissimilarities*

Drivers of the new agenda

- ➤ Wider social expectations of higher education and research

- ➤ The rise of the evaluative / regulatory state

- ➤ The shift to post-mass postsecondary participation

- ➤ The changing nature of higher education demand and supply

- ➤ Indicators of quality erosion in higher education
- ➤ Disaffection with conventional quality assurance and performance reporting
- ➤ Democratisation of access and seamlessness, and the assault on provider capture

Grappling with the uncomfortable trade-off

➢ A new 'realism', involving an uncomfortable trade-off of substantive autonomy in academic matters for continuing community support and operational autonomy in student admissions flexibility

➢ The challenge is to establish mutually agreed purposes and useful performance reporting frameworks

Dimensions of the reform agenda

➢ *Assuring acceptable threshold standards*

➢ *Validating quality beyond the threshold*

➢ *Achieving productivity improvements*

➢ *Accounting for learning additionality*

Assuring acceptable threshold standards

➢ 'Provider standards' as criteria for accreditation

 - *'capacity' standards* (adequacy of inputs, governance & management)

  - *'academic standards' (for teaching, learning, research)*

  - *'threshold academic standards'*

    * 'entry standards' for students & faculty

    * 'process standards' for curriculum, pedagogy & assessment

    * 'outcome standards' of graduate capability attainment

Framing questions:

(i)   *How can we be confident that all accredited providers can deliver good quality education?*

(ii)   *How can we be sure that all graduates are capable of performing at an acceptable level?*

Validating quality beyond the thresshold

➢ **intra-institutional validation**

   - e.g. internal monitoring, audits and reviews of alignment between program objectives, learning experiences, assessment processes and student outcomes

➢ **inter-institutional validation**

   - e.g. benchmarking institutional practices against national & international peers

➢ **external validation**

   - e.g. independent audits, and reviews by professional bodies & international experts

Framing questions: (i) How good are we? (ii) How do we know?

Achieving productivity improvements

➢ Administrative productivity

e.g. process efficiency reviews and re-engineering, joint procurement, shared services with other institutions, and outsourcing of administrative processing

➢ Teaching productivity

e.g. strategies for increasing the intensity of utilisation of space and infrastructure, and the use of new teaching technologies

➢ Learning productivity

e.g. strategies for reducing student dropout rates, especially in first year, through readiness programs, buddy systems, and structured student support

Framing questions: *(i) How can we achieve greater student throughput at lower our unit costs and with enhanced quality of learning? (ii) Where can we make cost savings? (iii) What are the priorities for the most expensive educational interventions?*

Accounting for learning additionality

➢ integrating improvement goals with accountability purposes, with a focus on 'value added'

➢ necessarily involves institutional purpose-specific and cohort-specific and individualised measures, rather than a common testing framework

➢But international tendency is to compare shifts in institutional and national mean scores & spreads over time

Framing questions: *(i) how well do higher education institutions extend the knowledge and skills of their students, and (ii) how do they and the wider community know?*

Tensions in the policy framework

➢ Over-scaling + under-funding putting downward pressure on quality – i.e. an efficiency but not a productivity agenda

➢ TEQSA will sharpen tension between funding & standards: unreasonable to set standards without providing sufficient funds to meet them

➢ Common rather than customised metrics promote sameness

➢ Mission drift will occur without structural differentiation

➢ Not all 'universities' can meet world standards for research

➢ An 'equity' approach to research leads to mediocrity

➢ A system cannot be world class without areas of international excellence

Shifts in Nation State - University Relationships

➢ from competitive/cooperative federalism to 'nationalising'

➢ from regulation tied to funding to regulation linked to licensing

➢ from trust to codification

➢ from self-set customised to externally-set common standards

➢ from meta regulation to micro-regulation

Supplements to decision-making

➢ *For students and employers:* supplementation of quality assurance mechanisms established in the supply-driven era, such as fitness-for-purpose according to institutional mission, with more consumer-oriented information, such as comparability of different provider offerings

➢ *For academics and university managers:* supplementation of the bases for internal judgement through reference to external expectations and capacity and performance benchmarks (e.g. GO8 Quality Verification System)

Towards a balanced approach

➢ Responding to the compelling imperatives for improved teaching effectiveness and greater transparency in assessment and performance reporting

➢ Safeguarding important aspects of university autonomy in the interests of quality, diversity and the free pursuit of knowledge

A nuanced approach to the compelling grounds

➤ *The probity threshold*

Institutions satisfying core criteria as bona fide providers

➤ *The transparency requirement*

Institutions making clear (i) what they offer - the objectives and learning experiences of programs, (ii) what they expect of students - by way of readiness and during the program, (iii) and how they assess student learning

➤ *The effectiveness imperative*

Institutions delivering what they promise; demonstrating that they have fulfilled their side of the contract with students and the community, and validating their claims about quality

➤ *The comparability challenge*

Institutions defining their distinctiveness; how their programs and graduates meet external expectations and how they differ.

The debates we have yet to have

- *Why are conventional indicators of quality and effectiveness not indicating serious problems?*

- *Whose standards matter most?*

- *What do we mean by the qualifiers : 'consistent', 'equivalent', 'comparable' in relation to academic standards?*

- *What is the place of standards in a diversified system?*

- *Is there an implicit agenda for a common curriculum in higher education, as for schooling?*

- *To what extent do threshold standards and standardised tests lead to standardisation of ends and means?*

- *Can academic standards be assessed absent peer review?*

- *Can a customised rather than a common approach to standards satisfy community concerns about higher education quality?*

Standards as pre-set and fixed or dynamic and varying criteria?

In the sport of high jumping:

- *Officials set the bar at the entry standard for the competition*

- *Normally competitor performances keep the bar rising*

- *It is not the officials but the athletes who achieve the heights of performance and set the standards of excellence*

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