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Best Practice in International Education in Australia

Abstract

 The three principle objectives of the Australian higher education system are learning and teaching, research, and community engagement. Nevertheless, only around 30 percent of Australians aged 25-34 have degree level qualifications, whereas this figures sits at around 50 percent in other OECD nations. As such, it is strongly believed that the development of higher education programs in other parts of the world are placing Australia at a disadvantage, thus emphasizing the need of education reform if the nation is to be competitive in the future. This paper, therefore, argues that several best practice strategies must be present in higher education, including diversity, research policy, funding accreditation, and community engagement, while also proposing that the full exploitation of information technology is also an issue related to best practices. In addition, it stresses the responsibility invested in those accountable for determining the role of education in Australian society, and how such factors impact both domestic and global factors and

outcomes, subsequently arguing that inadequate reforms will create a real threat to Australia's ability to maintain its high living standards and economic stability.

Introduction

Education is a quintessential aspect of a productive society. Countries throughout the world are striving to produce education systems that effectively ensure that students achieve optimal academic success so they can complete in today's increasingly global and increasingly competitive society. Marginson (2006) argues, "higher education is now situated in an open information environment in which national borders are routinely crossed and identities are continually made and self-made in encounters with diverse others. We can begin to imagine higher education as a single world-wide arrangement ."

Although the nation of Australia has been particularly astute concerning the development of an education system that consistently trains students in a manner that will allows them to excel throughout life, statistics show that Australian students do not achieve the same levels of academic success as do their counterparts in most other OECD natoions. Nevertheless, Higher Education is of significant importance as it pertains to the future development of Australia.   The purpose of this discussion, therefore, is to explore best practices in International Education in Australia in relation to the nation's ability to become a first-class player in global education.

The Current Condition of Australia's Higher EducationSystem

In recent years researchers have focused on how to enhance and improve Australia's higher education system. A report entitled *Review of Australian Higher Education*, which is more commonly known as the "Bradley Review," and published by Melbourne University, states;

> "Australia is falling behind other countries in performance and investment in higher education. Developed and developing countries alike accept there are strong links between their productivity and the proportion of the population with high-level skills. These countries have   concluded that they must invest not only to encourage a major increase in the numbers of the population with degree-level qualifications but also to improve the quality of graduates. Australia is losing ground. Within the OECD we are now 9th out of 30 in the proportion of our population aged 25 to 34 years with such qualifications, down from 7th a decade ago."

This research, as previously mentioned, also highlights the fact that almost 30 percent of Australians aged 25-34 have degree-level qualifications but in other OECD nations nearly 50% of people in this range have such qualifications. As such the development of higher education programs in other parts of the world will place Australia at a disadvantage if the issue is not remedied quickly. This implies that in the near future Australia will require the presence of well-qualified individuals if the nation wishes to continue to compete on a global level. In addition, research also suggests that by 2010 the number of individuals with undergraduate degrees will not be consistent with the demand for people with such degrees (Gray & Radloff, 2010). As a result the

higher education system in Australia must make a concerted effort to take into consideration the needs of underrepresented groups including indigenous population and people from low income backgrounds (Filan & Seagren, 2003).

Research, therefore, strongly suggests that Australia's system of higher education needs to be dramatically improved if it is to compete globaly. As such, the nation can no longer settle for a subpar system that is not designed to meet the needs of all Australians. Furthermore, future efforts to improve the higher education system in Australia must consider the role of globalization and the ways in which globalization has forever changed the transfer of information. Consequently, the reformed education system in Australia must be one that embraces viewpoints that might not have been considered in the past. Indeed, reform will necessitate a new way of thinking about the function of higher education in society.

Best Practice in International Education in Australia

Research highlights three primary goals of Australian education, including learning and teaching, research, and community engagement. In addition, the report emphasizes that the major goal of higher education, like all other levels, is the transfer of knowledge and/or ideas/theories, while also defining knowledge transfer as being one of the primary goals of higher education. Finally, the report defines knowledge transfer as "the direct, two-way interactions between the University and its external communities, involving the development, exchange and application of knowledge and expertise for mutual benefit (Bradley, 2008).

The Bradley Report also focuses on policies that must be implemented in order to ensure the Australian higher education system is successful and meets the needs of students. It explains, for example, several best practices that must be present in higher education in order to ensure its overall efficiency. These policies include the following:

- Diversity as it pertains to diversity: The report explains that policy neutrality is needed amongst the various types of tertiary education institutions (Bradley, 2008). Such neutrality means that students should be able to access tuition subsidies based on impartial standards as opposed to the history of the institution. The research also indicates that diploma and advanced diploma funding should be implemented. There should also be some variation in funding between institutions. In addition funding should be inclusive of expenditures dedicated to knowledge transfer and community engagement (Bradley, 2008). In other words institutions of higher education in Australia must be cognizant of the different types of needs that exist and develop policies that are as heterogeneous as the communities that they serve.

- Accreditation: Any institution of higher learning must be properly credentialed to ensure that established standards are met. The report explains the need for "A national accreditation system, covering all public and private post-secondary education, run by a national regulator (Bradley, 2008). In addition the report points out that self-accrediting- institutions need a higher level of external review. Accreditation is an important step in developing a higher education system that is standardized; that is, accreditation guarantees that institutions of higher learning adhere to certain guidelines as it pertains to the

type of education that students receive. This means that all students at accredited universities will have to complete the same number of hours and attend similar types of classes depending on the field in which they are studying. Such a strategy serves the purpose creating uniformity in the education system and producing graduates who are prepared to function effectively in the workforce.

- Research policy funding: There is also a significant need for funding as it pertains to project grants that must be funded through institutional grants (Bradley,2008). There must also be a wide ranging system design so that a combination of performance driven block grants and project grants are available. Young researchers need to have enhanced career paths (Bradley, 2008). In addition, research must be restricted to institutions that have the capacity to carry out specific types of research. The ability to carry-out research is important in the university setting because it attracts students and funding to institutions of higher learning. There are many institutions of higher learning throughout the world that are famous because of their capacity to effectively carry-out research in specific fields of interest such as medicine.

- Community engagement and other types of special funding: The report explains that separate funding is needed to promote performance. In addition, such funding can be difficult to achieve because of the diverse nature of activities. Overall community engagement is therefore necessary to demonstrate to the community the importance of higher education and to encourage improvements to higher education in Australia. The community

must understand their role in assisting in the improvement of higher

education—they must be empowered.

In addition to the aforementioned policies in the context of best practices in higher

education in Australia, the research also reports on some of the practices necessary to

guaranteeing academic success in higher education in the 21st century. These include

the intergration of technology into the collegiate setting. According to Ragusa et al

(2009) "Technology is a socio-historical product (Bijker et al. 1994; Kranzberg 1986;

Smith & Marx 1994) that has irrevocably altered business models and policies, including

higher education (Stein 2001), in Australia and worldwide (Ragusa et al 2009, 679).

The authors further explain that in the current environment the global marketplace

and technology dictate the type of learning environments, which differ substantially as it

pertains to culture and place. For instance, the advent of Distance Education (DE) is

"one culturally and structurally driven expression of contemporary education in

Australian society. While popularly associated with the advent of web-based

technologies, DE is not a new phenomenon (Ragusa et al 2009, 679)." The author

asserts that during the nineteenth century many universities had correspondence

programs. These programs remained popular for many years because they were

different from more conventional learning environments. At the current time, distance

education is driven by the pace of technological change and such changes are

occurring globally in a manner that is rapid and complex.

There are currently more than 130 countries in which institutions of higher learning

provide students with distance courses (Ragusa et al 2009). These courses often have

as a foundation new information and communication technologies. In Australia, for

example, "DE has particularly been embraced, at institutional and policy levels, as a means of extending higher education to rural, isolated, and often structurally disadvantaged learners (little or no access to a reliable internet source and/or library resources or even in some cases electricity). Although the physical limitations imposed by geography, particularly rural geographies, impact individual choice and availability of learning style, and thereby make DE a more attractive option to some, according to the NSW Department of Education and Training (Ragusa et al 2009, 680).

In current technology age it is vitally important that technology is seen as one of the central aspects of instruction. The failure to properly utilize technology places students at a disadvantage because they will be less prepared that his/her contemporaries from around the world. Technology has been the key to globalization in recent years and without the presence of technology any higher education goals that Australia has will end in complete failure. Students must know how to maneuver around computers if they are going to be productive in the future. Interactive technology tools such as stimulus projects for business classes require the use of computer software. This software informs managers concerning budget, marketing operations and timelines are all contained on the software. This type of learning tool is important to have because it allows students to learn and formulate opinions about business in an environment that they feel comfortable in because of the use of computers.

Implementation of Best Practices

There are many different policies that can be adopted as part of a wide ranging initiative to improve the higher education system in Australia. However, these policies

must be carefully implemented to ensure success. According to Gray & Radloff (2010), "In higher education it has been said that 'Effective planning creates focus, direction, and energy. Most important, strategic plans can assist in building a shared commitment to a common future' (Filan & Seagren, 2003, p. 21), while strategic plans have been shown to be an advantage in research that sought to operate as a complex adaptive system (McMillan & Carlisle, 2007; Gray & Radloff 2010,292). This, therefore, suggests that the proper implementation of best practices policies are as important as the policies themselves.

Finally, the above research shows that prior to the development of any strategy to implement best practices policies, there must be a consensus about the most important steps that need to be taken and in what order change needs to occur. This will require the cooperation and collaboration of many different experts in the field of education. Such efforts are necessary because they decrease the likelihood that implementation will fail and these efforts also increase the likelihood that the decisions made as a result of the collaboration are efficient and effective.

Recommendations

As a result of Australia's low percentage of 25-34 year olds with bachelor degrees when compared to other countries, it is recommended that the Australian government establish new goals. This means by 2020 the Australian government should establish the goal of 40% of the aforementioned population attaining a bachelor's degree (Bailey, 2008). Setting such goals is an important part of reinforcing the importance of higher

education in Australian society while also improving the number of university educated individuals to meet the demand for the skills they possess.

Bailey (2008) also emphasizes the dire need for scholarships. Scholarships are particularly important for groups that are underrepresented in higher education including indigenous Australians and poor Australians. In addition Bailey asserts that international students should also receive scholarships. As a result the author recommends that "the Australian Government provide up to 1,000 tuition subsidy scholarships per year for international students in higher degree by research programs targeted to areas of skills shortage. The scholarships would give the recipients the benefit of being enrolled on the same basis as domestic students (Bailey, 2008). "The purpose of such a policy goes back to the idea of transferring knowledge and understanding cultural differences in an increasingly global world.

In addition, one of the primary recommendations is the need for the Australian government to strictly adhere to the best practices suggestion made by Bailey and others. One of the central themes presented by Bailey and others is the need for Australia to embrace its own diversity. The indigenous people of Australia have been affected by years of governmental and social abuses. As a result, their presence on university campuses in Australia is sorely lacking. Therefore it is recommended that programs be developed that strictly target indigenous groups. Such programs will reflect the idea that indigenous people are welcomed to come to university and study. Fostering this type of relationship promotes trust and encourages involvement. If Australia can understand the importance of having a type of diversity on campus that is reflected in Australian society, great things can occur. Not only does the education of

indigenous people benefit the aboriginal people but is also has an important impact on the entire country. This occurs because education serves as one of the primary means by which people can lift themselves out of poverty. This leads to a decrease in overall levels of poverty and this decrease in poverties fosters the development of a society with less crime and a higher quality of life.

The other major practice that must be put into use immediately is the various uses of technology that can nurture an environment in which students feel more at ease. Although many universities throughout Australia have incorporated some technology into the classroom, this practice has not fully been exploited. Additionally, technology is vitally important to Australia's higher education progress because it allows remote users to receive an education. This means that anyone with internet access can receive an education. The use of technology in this way could also encourage to attainment of an education by people who live in more rural areas.

Overall, it is recommended that those with the authority to determine the role of education in Australian society recognize the responsibility that they have. Global competition can be a real threat to the ability of a country to maintain its high living standards and economic stability. The research indicates that the people of Australia are already lagging behind many countries in the world, if this continues Australians may have a difficult time recovering and such recovery efforts could eventually become impossible. With these things understood, it is recommended that the Australian government take swift and immediate action to implement best practice techniques into the higher education system in Australia.

Conclusion

The purpose of this discussion was to explore best practice in International Education in Australia. Overall the research indicates that Australia is facing an extremely difficult crossroads. On the one hand, the nation remains one of the most educated societies in the world. On the other hand, the number of university educated people in Australia will not continue to keep pace with demand. With these things understood there are certain practices that can and should be adopted so that success can be present in the future.

As it pertains to the best practice that must be adopted issues such as diversity, funding, community engagement, the use of technology and tuition breaks for international students were all important policies that must be addressed and properly implemented into a new paradigm. This new paradigm will be designed to allow the free flow of information and allow Australia to flourish as it seeks to clarify and restructure the role of education in society. The overall purpose of the paradigm shift is to increase the number of university graduates. Accomplishing the goal in the years to come will be challenging but also important because the skills acquired in higher education classrooms will be in demand. The Australian government must therefore taeke the initiative necessary to implement certain standards and be brave enough to enforce these standards as it pertains to Australia and education.

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