‘There can be no end to the building of a university’

In May 1960, several months before amalgamation, Sir Leslie Melville, as he was now called, addressed the University’s seventh annual conferring of degrees ceremony, held as usual in the Albert Hall. This time twenty graduates took out the degree of PhD, many more than in any previous year. Eleven of them were present, along with most members of the academic and administrative staff.

‘We have come to the end of a beginning’, said Melville, ‘for this is the last time we shall meet as a purely research university’. He spoke confidently of achievements to date, mentioning specific successes in each of the four schools, the increasing numbers of publications and students, and the growing reputation of the ANU in the world of learning. He spoke too of the buildings already erected and planned for the future. With amalgamation the campus was set to expand from 193 to 331 acres: but this, said Melville, was unlikely to be enough. To provide for future growth the University was seeking an additional 100 acres of neighbouring land. As he told his audience, ‘There can be no end to the building of a University’.

This was Melville’s last graduation ceremony. After seven years as Vice-Chancellor, he retired on the eve of amalgamation to become Chairman of the Tariff Board, where he was free of Oliphant’s badgering. To succeed him, Oliphant, supported by Eccles, nominated Leonard Huxley, who satisfied Oliphant’s essential criterion of not being an economist. A former Rhodes Scholar for Tasmania, Huxley had been with Oliphant in Birmingham and was now Elder Professor of Physics at the University of Adelaide. As a member of Council from 1956 to 1959, he was well known and well liked at the ANU and his appointment went through with less anguish than had accompanied that of his two predecessors. Oliphant assumed that, having spent many years in England, Huxley would understand what a real university was all about, and that as a fellow scientist he would have a proper appreciation of the capital requirements of pioneering research in nuclear physics. But if he had expected...
The campus in 1963, a year before the filling of Lake Burley Griffin. Clearing for the lake is evident at the top left and centre. The Childers Street buildings inherited from Canberra University College are at the bottom left, and the CSIRO complex is at the right. The numbers show some of the major buildings, several of them recently completed or under construction:
1 Haydon-Allen;
2 General Studies
   Library (later the J.B. Chifley Building);
3 H.C. Coombs;
4 Oriental Studies;
5 R.G. Menzies;
6 University House;
7 Cockcroft;
8 JCSMR;
9 Bruce Hall;
10 Physics (SGS);
11 Chemistry;
12 Geology.
Australian News and Information Bureau, ANU Collection.
him to favour one part of the University over the others, he would have been wrong: Huxley was impartial from the outset.

Like Melville, Huxley was a shy man, with absolute integrity and little taste for academic wheeling and dealing. Formal in manner, he never removed his coat, even on the hottest Canberra days. He preferred one to one discussions rather than large meetings, and got on well with the staff he worked with regularly. Occasionally he lost his temper, glowering with large, fierce eyebrows at academics who made a nuisance of themselves at committee meetings. Although he worked hard, some saw him as a reluctant Vice-Chancellor, too fond of delegation, and more interested in birdwatching or some problem in cloud physics than in University policy and administration. Where Melville had a detailed understanding of the University’s finances, Huxley had neither interest nor capacity in financial affairs. When forced to consider some budgetary matter his eyes tended to glaze over, wandering perhaps towards a pair of gang-gang cockatoos consorting in the gum tree outside his office. Within eighteen months of his appointment, he and other senior members of the University agreed that someone else should take overall financial responsibility; so Crawford, only just settled into the headship of Pacific Studies, accepted an honorary appointment as Fiscal Adviser. Oliphant might not have appreciated the irony; while he had made sure the Vice-Chancellor was not an economist, his own nominee turned out to be so little interested in budgetary matters that financial power fell into the hands of an outstanding economist from the social science schools.

Taking up duty on 30 September 1960, the day before the amalgamated University came into being, Huxley anticipated that his main job over the coming years would be to make amalgamation work. This proved to be a demanding task. On the other hand, he had the good fortune to preside over the University when the country was affluent and the government prepared to endow generous funding for tertiary education. His seven years in office were, as he later recalled, honeymoon years between the universities and the government, when it sometimes seemed necessary only to ask in order to receive.

From the date of amalgamation until Huxley’s retirement at the end of 1967, undergraduate numbers quadrupled, from about 800 to 3200. Postgraduate numbers increased at an even greater rate, from 120 to 500. Total expenditure on the University increased from $5.5 million to $17.5 million. The most obvious evidence of expansion was the changing appearance of the campus, where buildings sprang up like mushrooms where real mushrooms used to be.

Builders were always at work on two or three sites at the one time. When Huxley came, the only ‘permanent’ buildings were University House, the Cockcroft Building for the Physical Sciences, the John Curtin School building and the boiler house, together with the recently opened Haydon-Allen Building in the School of General Studies. When he left, these had been joined by the Coombs Building for Social Sciences and Pacific Studies, buildings for Geophysics, Mathematics and Chemistry; and in the School of General Studies, new buildings or groups of buildings for Geology, Botany, Zoology, Chemistry, Law, Oriental Studies and Economics. There
were two libraries, an administrative building known as the Chancery, and a students’ union (later converted to an administrative building). The first of the halls of residence, Bruce Hall, which opened soon after Huxley arrived, was followed by Burton Hall and Garran Hall, while plans for colleges run by religious denominations were well advanced. The site now looked like a university.

Where was the University headed? Despite Melville’s confident predictions, this rate of growth could not continue forever. In 1962, after the University had set forth its program for the next three years under the government’s new system of triennial funding, Partridge raised the question in relation to the Institute of Advanced Studies. Besides being Director of the Research School of Social Sciences and Deputy Chairman (de facto Chairman) of the Institute, Partridge was an astute observer of the overall framework of tertiary education in Australia. Assuming the role of ‘internal philosopher’ to the University, he suggested to his colleagues that, after twelve years of development and planning, they should have some firm ideas about the Institute’s ‘final form’. ‘Until now’, he wrote, ‘we have never taken the trouble to ask ourselves concerning the Institute what the machine will be like when it is finished, and how it will work’. They had moved forward on the principle that it was better to travel than to arrive; and if there was any philosophy behind the Institute’s current plans, it seemed to be one of ‘galloping, permanent expansion’.

Partridge thus introduced the notion of ‘completion’ to Institute planning and started a discussion which continued until the 1970s, when a new era of financial constraint made it no longer relevant. Various questions were open to debate. How large should the Institute be, both on its own account and in relation to the School of General Studies? What should be the total number of research schools, and how large should each school be? What was the optimum size of a department? What influences should be allowed to determine the rate of growth? These questions raised others about how widely the Institute should cast its academic net and how many disciplines it should try to cover.

Partridge’s own view was that the Institute should not simply be another university which happened to specialise in research and postgraduate teaching, but a ‘relatively small, compact and concentrated’ research institution. In choosing subjects for research, it should be ‘extremely selective’: ‘we should go for quality, and for intensity and solidity of work rather than for width or range’. His colleagues agreed, sketching ‘a picture of an Institute of limited size, containing at most six Schools, each containing a number of rather small departments which could change with time’. They also agreed that any attempt to make the Institute ‘complete’ by including all the disciplines normally found in a university would be disastrous. On the other hand, there was also a feeling that it should eventually contain schools representing ‘the basic divisions of knowledge’, including Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Medical and Biological Sciences together, and the two existing social science schools. These principles found their way into a policy document which, in broad terms, set the course of development during the next decade. The document avoided difficult questions about the proper nature of Institute research, simply concluding that there was no formal limit on the branches of learning the Institute could encompass.
Everyone agreed that the Institute should not be allowed to become too big, partly because it would be impossible to continue to recruit staff of the highest calibre, but also because a large Institute would lose its identity and coherence. But how large was too large? The medical scientists were happy to remain within the walls of their already substantial building. Ennor reinforced the case for restraint by suggesting that when medical science departments grew much beyond ten members they tended to become amorphous and moribund. The physical scientists, on the other hand, argued for departments of up to thirty, since expensive equipment demanded more staff to make use of it. The outcome avoided placing a numerical limit on schools or on the Institute as a whole, settling instead for a statement of general principle: ‘if there is not a ready and free interchange of ideas and healthy criticism both between and within Schools, then the Institute of Advanced Studies would surely have become too large’.

Apart from restricting the size of departments in normal circumstances to twelve members, this policy left the Institute to develop as Partridge had described the social science schools growing in previous years, ‘as our academic interests pull us’. Nobody seemed willing to come to terms with numbers. This was understandable: academic organisations should be measured for size as intellectual rather than administrative entities. And while the optimum size of departments could be determined on the basis of experience in other institutions, the research schools were entirely new. Who could say what numbers would function best? In the meantime, the Institute continued to expand. By the end of the decade, two new schools, covering the fields of Chemistry and Biological Sciences, had been added to the original four; and within Physical Sciences, the Department of Geophysics and Geochemistry was starting to resemble a school within a school.

By now the University had a new Vice-Chancellor. Huxley was succeeded at the end of 1967 by Crawford, whose years as Fiscal Adviser made him well aware of the problem of size. In 1972 he decided it was time ‘once and for all’ to make a definitive statement about the size of the research schools. Using the John Curtin School with a target of 100 academic staff as a benchmark, he suggested a limit of 120 for each of the three other original schools. Geophysics and Geochemistry were excluded from the Physical Sciences total, in anticipation of the formation of a new school of Earth Sciences. The new schools of Chemistry and Biological Sciences were assigned a limit of 85 and 80 respectively, bringing the Institute total to 625, plus a yet unspecified allocation for Earth Sciences.

It proved easier to set limits than to enforce them. By the mid-1970s three schools were well in excess of their allocation, with Social Sciences reaching 174 full-time academic staff in 1975, including appointments on outside funds, and Pacific Studies just one behind. So long as money, buildings and staff were available, and ideas for research were plentiful, pressure for growth would be hard to resist.

The size of the Institute was discussed chiefly in terms of academic staff numbers; for the School of General Studies the measure was students. With fewer than a thousand undergraduates in 1960, any problem relating to ultimate size may have seemed remote. But as the School, unlike the Institute, had other universities to look to as models, and as size seemed to be an issue everywhere, the question came up for discussion soon after amalgamation.
There was no single accepted view of the optimum size of a university. In 1960, Australian universities (excluding the ANU) ranged from 1300 students at the University of Tasmania to over 11,000 at each of Sydney and Melbourne. By the end of the decade, the largest universities had student numbers approaching 17,000. In 1964 a Commonwealth government Committee of Inquiry into the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia (the Martin Committee) suggested that, in Australian conditions, universities of fewer than 4000 students might be considered too small, while those with more than 10,000 might be too large.

The School of General Studies had already expressed a preference for remaining small. Members of staff who had been part of the School in its former life were keen to retain the sense of intimacy that had been associated with the College. The universities of Sydney and Melbourne, which appeared to lack unity and to overwhelm the individual student, were not attractive models. J.E. Richardson, Dean of the Faculty of Law, commented on ‘the impersonal and deleterious atmosphere’ associated with the large law schools and urged that his faculty restrict itself to the equivalent of 400 undergraduates. Huxley believed that universities undertook a change of character once they exceeded 4000 students, and boasted that ANU students enjoyed a privileged relationship with their professors and lecturers compared with their counterparts in the larger institutions.

But as in the Institute, there were formidable pressures for growth. At the time of amalgamation, the Prime Minister had made it clear that the University’s rate of development must be related in some degree to the growth of Canberra. During the early 1960s, Canberra was transformed by an infusion of public servants from Melbourne and Sydney, the construction of numerous public buildings, the opening of new suburbs in the Woden Valley, and the filling of Lake Burley Griffin, all of which helped confirm that the idea of the national capital was something more than a previous generation’s folly. Between 1958 and 1965 the population more than doubled to nearly 87,000, and the city’s planners expected it to reach a quarter of a million by 1980. With such projections, the figure of 4000 soon seemed inadequate.

At the same time, this was the National University, and as such it had an obligation, implied in the ANU Act, to cater for students from other parts of the country. While there was no prescribed ratio for ‘local’ to ‘national’ intake, it was generally understood that one group of students should not overwhelm the other. At the moment it was possible to admit everyone who matriculated and wanted a place. But how long would the University be able to meet both local and national demands? At some stage, admission standards more rigorous than bare matriculation would surely have to be imposed.

Leaving aside the question of demand for places, there were many within the University who insisted that departments and faculties must grow in order to flourish. In an age of increasing specialisation, so the argument went, large departments were essential to ‘cover the field’, as well as to provide room for new developments. Richard Johnson, Professor of Classics, was convinced that at least 8000 undergraduates were needed if the School of General Studies was to become anything more than ‘a competent, run-of-the-mill undergraduate college, with a very limited range of
disciplines’. Where Classics departments in some universities had concentrations of expertise in specific areas, in his own department a permanent staff of six had to cover languages, history, philosophy, art and archaeology, poetry and rhetoric, and education. With resources spread so thinly, said Johnson, the department could never achieve an international reputation.

Against these pressures, the optimum number of undergraduate enrolments never seemed fixed. In 1964 it was increased to 5700; but later in the decade, the Faculty of Arts was looking to 3000 Arts students alone, though this figure was later reduced to 2200. In 1969 C.A. (Cec) Gibb brought the issue to a head, arguing that the time had come to decide on the ultimate size of the School. As Deputy Chairman of the Board of the School, Gibb occupied the position equivalent to that of Partridge in the Institute in earlier years, and he shared with Partridge a broad interest in institutional structures and educational philosophy. Before joining Canberra University College as foundation Professor of Psychology in 1955, he had spent several years in the United States, first as a doctoral student at the huge University of Illinois and later as a visiting lecturer at the small college of Dartmouth in New Hampshire. He was therefore familiar with the relative merits of large and small institutions. His reflections on the size of the School were also informed by his interests as a psychologist in leadership and group dynamics.

There was no real way, said Gibb, to establish an optimum size for universities generally, or for any one institution. There were, however, several considerations which might be used to set a maximum size for the undergraduate population of the ANU. He placed at the top of his list ‘a sense of community’, quoting a comment of the Duke of Edinburgh at the University of Hull: ‘Don’t grow beyond 4,000. Remember tribalism is important.’ A sense of community, said Gibb, meant that students and staff identified themselves with the university rather than a specific part of it, and that there were opportunities for interaction across disciplinary lines as far apart as Chemistry and Hindi. Other criteria included the freedom to communicate on a personal basis between staff and students, which meant that classes should remain small; the capacity of policy-making bodies to represent and respond to the views of the University community; and the ability of the institution to accommodate the bright dreams of future years.

Gibb offered no formula and came up with no new figures, though he calculated that the University’s present target was about right. This accorded with Crawford’s view that the ANU should remain a small and select institution which aimed to teach a limited range of disciplines very well indeed. Council agreed, and in 1970 imposed a limit of 5900 undergraduate enrolments, with the expectation that this number would be reached in a decade. As it turned out, enrolments in 1981 were about a thousand short of that mark, owing in part to the increasing availability of tertiary places throughout Australia.
Maintaining the difference

It had always been intended that the ANU should be different. Until 1960, that had been easy enough to achieve. As well as being unique in having no undergraduates, it was the only university funded entirely by the Commonwealth; and it was funded far more generously than any of the state universities. While it could lay claim to some of the traditional characteristics of a university, especially autonomy and academic freedom, further parallels with the state universities seemed remote.

From the 1960s onwards this sense of difference, much valued by many members of the University, came increasingly under challenge, as a result of changes both on and off the ANU campus. Amalgamation brought the most obvious change in the form of undergraduate students, the main distinguishing feature of state universities. And just as the ANU was accepting its first undergraduates, the state universities were devoting more of their efforts to postgraduate training. This new concern with postgraduates was illustrated graphically by the increasing numbers of graduates taking out the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from all Australian universities: from a dozen in 1950 to 117 a decade later. (Granted, the ANU accounted for twenty of these, and the number of higher doctorates had diminished: but the increase was still impressive.)

The third sweeping change which had a profound effect on the ANU was the growing involvement of the Commonwealth government in higher education. The Murray Report in 1957 signalled the beginnings of what the Adelaide historian Hugh Stretton called at the time a ‘noble revolution’ in the universities. To the surprise of many, the Menzies government accepted the report’s recommendations in their entirety, and unprecedented grants for capital works and recurrent costs poured into the existing universities and provided the foundations of new ones. Shortly afterwards, the New South Wales University of Technology widened its functions and changed its name to the University of New South Wales, and Monash University was founded in Melbourne. Then, in the mid-1960s, both Sydney and Melbourne were given third universities, Adelaide a second, and the college in Newcastle was elevated to University status. Student numbers increased dramatically: from 37,000 when Murray delivered his report, to 33,000 in 1960 and 83,000 in 1965.

Apart from encouraging the government to open its coffers, the Murray Report recommended the formation of a committee to advise the states and the Commonwealth on how the money should be spent and to formulate policy towards the universities at a national level. The result was the Australian Universities Commission (AUC), which was charged with the task of implementing the Murray proposals and promoting (in the words of the legislation which created it) ‘the balanced development of universities so that their resources could be used to the greatest possible advantage of Australia’.

This was a momentous initiative. In the past, the Commonwealth had supported the universities through the states while avoiding direct involvement in university affairs. Now it was appointing a more or less independent body, chaired by the Melbourne physicist Sir Leslie Martin, to oversee the system. While each state government continued to have responsibility for its own university or universities, the
In the temporary administration building, members of the Australian Universities Commission meet senior members of the University (and prospective founders of a research school of chemistry) in 1962. The Vice-Chancellor, Huxley, is at the far end of the table, in front of the door, and the Chairman of the AUC, Sir Leslie Martin, six to his right. Much of the discussion is about building projects: plans line the right hand wall, and a model of the proposed building for the Social Sciences and Pacific Studies schools is in the centre.

Australian Universities Commission quickly assumed a major role in determining how each university and the system as a whole should be allowed to develop and in demanding levels of accountability. This was a revolution in central planning, more in keeping with the activities of the post-war Labor governments than with the restrained rule of Menzies and his colleagues. Until a decade ago, said Stretton in 1964, there was only micro-analysis, or rather micro-impressionism, of university problems: ‘People in universities knew what they were like, and had various ideas of what they needed’. Now there were foundations for planning, both rational and national. ‘We can count the customers, compare the costs, predict the breakdowns.’ It was becoming possible to make an informed choice about how much of the national effort should go to the universities, and about the most economical distribution of resources among them. In short, where the individual universities had once stood in tenuous relationship to one another and to the Commonwealth government, the creation of the AUC signalled the beginnings of a university system.

Astute commentators at the time, such as Stretton and Partridge, noted that these changes entailed risks. There was a tendency, wrote Partridge, to regard universities as public institutions, giving effect to important aspects of public policy, and therefore being accountable for the way in which they carried out their public functions. He wondered what this would mean for traditional ideas about academic autonomy. Would universities in the future, he asked, be less independent, more conformist, more utilitarian, more fully professionalised? Universities, once fairly well insulated from their host society, would now be obliged to have carefully prepared policies that could be defended before such bodies as the AUC.

What did the changes mean for the ANU? Initially there was some doubt whether the University would be part of the system at all. The AUC Act, which referred explicitly to ‘universities established by the Commonwealth’, made it clear that it would. But in early meetings between members of the Commission and the University, both parties were unsure what the exact nature of the relationship should be. The Commission decided to
assess the needs of the ANU alongside those of the state universities, while acknowledging that the ANU was free to approach the Commonwealth government for any development request, without referring to the Commission. Crawford, however, in his capacity as Fiscal Adviser, concluded that the government was unlikely to support any ANU proposal unless it had AUC support: safest to be in the system rather than out of it. So the University embraced the AUC with guarded optimism, and started to think and plan in terms of the AUC’s triennial calendar.

In its submissions to the Commission, the University emphasised, first, that it was quite different in character from the state universities and, second, that each of its two major sections had to maintain its own function. The Commission readily accepted the second premise, which the government took a step further by preventing the transfer of funds from one section to the other. But with regard to the first, the AUC did not take long to decide that the School of General Studies could be compared with any other Australian university. Nor did the University take long to realise that such comparisons might not be to its advantage. Although the system was well endowed, the demand for funds invariably exceeded the supply. For example, submissions from all universities for the triennium beginning in 1967 totalled £103 million compared with £41 million for the triennium then current. In such circumstances, all the universities, the School included, would have to exercise restraint.

People elsewhere in the system were on the watch for signs of favouritism. When the Commission visited the ANU in 1962, Martin warned that he and his fellow commissioners would have to look critically at building projects, since other universities sometimes felt that the ANU received special treatment from the AUC. Another of the commissioners (the retailer and philanthropist K.B. Myer) remarked pointedly that the University was proposing an extensive program for relatively few students. Crawford drew the conclusion, obvious only in retrospect, that the Commission was inclined to make comparisons between universities in terms of costs per student. This policy, as part of an increasing tendency to make statistical data the basis of policy decisions, had implications for the debate on the size of the School: the ANU might wish to restrict undergraduate numbers, but would it be allowed to do so? As Stretton remarked, ‘objective’ planning almost invariably made a case for big universities. On matters such as academic salaries and student to staff ratios, the School of General Studies found itself (sometimes reluctantly) pulled into line.

Having decided that the Institute was unique, the AUC continued to treat it as a special case with needs over and above those of ordinary universities. Australia could afford only one such organisation, said Martin, so it had to be a good one. Funds were therefore granted to the Institute without specific reference to submissions from other universities. The Commission accepted that members of the Institute should

Charles Bastable, a designer in the Buildings and Grounds division and occasional cartoonist for ANU publications, depicts the AUC as a source of munificence, about 1971.
receive higher salaries than their counterparts in state universities and the School of General Studies, and encouraged them to assert their identity, advising for example that all grades of subprofessorial staff should have distinctive titles. So, at the Commission’s suggestion, Readers in the Institute became ‘Professorial Fellows’, a title unique to the ANU which not too subtly disguised the salary differential.

The Institute was said to be unique, not just in its form and functions, but also in the quality of its research. ‘Our constant aim must be excellence’, declared an Institute policy paper in 1962; and for many years, until the word lost meaning through overusage, ‘excellence’, whether aimed for or achieved, was proclaimed as a distinguishing feature.

As the University told the AUC, the Institute was not in competition with the state universities. In fact, the research schools set themselves apart by deliberately avoiding research in areas which state universities claimed as their own. This policy led the Institute to define its role as conducting outstanding research and training in a limited range of subject areas where it had what the economists referred to as a ‘comparative advantage’. This could take several forms: the location of Canberra (relevant for Astronomy), the availability of outstanding equipment (such as accelerators in Physical Sciences and the purpose-built instruments in Neurophysiology), and the presence at the ANU of academics whose brilliance was reason in itself for promoting particular areas of research. More often than not, the work of the research schools was justified by a combination of such advantages which placed the Institute in a league of its own, or at least in a position of leadership.

The School of General Studies seemed to challenge the University’s claim to uniqueness. During an early visit to the ANU, Martin remarked that the University’s main problem was to reach some understanding about the School’s role and suggested that if it was to play its true part in a national university it must have a stature and character different from the universities in the states. This was easier said than done. Crawford, when he became Vice-Chancellor, conceded that the School had not departed much from the traditional mould and urged fresh thinking to avoid conformity. Oliphant, with characteristic bluntness, expressed widely held fears that the threat to the University’s uniqueness came from within: ‘The more that formal undergraduate training is allowed to dominate the University, the more certainly we shall become just another Australian university’.

‘Poor relations’

Melville set the tone of relations between the two parts of the University in his 1960 graduation address. ‘Nothing would be more tragic’, he declared, ‘than if a great teaching university grew up at the expense of a great research institution’. The whole University, said Melville, must advance evenly: ‘but the pace must be set by the Institute’.

Menzies may have intended that Canberra should have only one university, but in many respects there continued to be two, albeit sharing the one name and the one
campus. Between the two there was a good deal of cooperation, as there had been before amalgamation. This differed greatly from one subject area to the next, and changed as each part of the University took on new areas of teaching or research. In the early years, members of the John Curtin School, for example, had virtually nothing to do with SGS (the School of General Studies), where there was nobody with similar research interests. Oliphant complained that he had offered to give lectures in the School at any level, but had been brushed off. On the other hand, social scientists from several departments strolled across the campus to give the occasional lecture or participate in a joint seminar.

The dual structure had significant administrative and academic costs, the most obvious of which were seen in the Library. The University’s foundation Librarian, A.L.G. McDonald retired at the time of amalgamation, and was succeeded by his deputy, J.J. Graneek, who had the formidable task of seeking to achieve, as he put it, ‘a measure of unity in diversity’. Unity at first existed only in name. While there was a University Library and a University Librarian, there were two collections, each administered by an associate librarian, each with a cataloguing system incompatible with the other, and each housed in its own building. New buildings were opened in 1963 for each collection. The building for the Institute collection was named after R.G. Menzies, to honour the universities’ current and prospective benefactor. The SGS building was initially called the General Studies Library until Crisp and others urged that it be given comparable status with the Menzies by calling it the J.B. Chifley Building, to remember the Prime Minister at the time the ANU was founded, and at the same time maintain the University’s bipartisan spirit. To complicate matters, the natural science schools already had their own small libraries, while separate collections were planned for other areas, including Oriental Studies and Law.

With the two main collections growing side by side within a limited overall budget, the Librarian had no chance of pleasing everyone. Each side of the campus suggested that the other was being favoured. People in the Institute complained about delays in cataloguing, insufficient opening times, and the absurdity of having to use the Chifley Building as external borrowers. Their colleagues in SGS insisted that undergraduates should have access to the whole University collection. As Crisp concluded in 1968, the original decision to divide the Library into two had been ‘administratively and financially disastrous’. By that time the Library housed half a million books, and was growing at a faster rate than the architects of amalgamation had ever foreseen.

Graneek worked hard to rationalise the administration and the collections, abandoning the system of associate librarians in charge of each collection in favour of librarians responsible for subject areas. He proposed that the two buildings should be known as the research and undergraduate collections, serving the needs of the University as a whole. And he replaced the inadequate Bliss classification system, as
well as the less unsatisfactory Dewey, by a single Library of Congress
catalogue. By the time of his retirement in 1972, computer technology
was offering new opportunities for remedying the mistakes of the past.

Practical problems aside, the University in two parts created an
environment which encouraged disharmony. At the outset, the mood of
the Institute was uncompromising, even on seemingly trivial matters of
nomenclature. When the College asked on the eve of amalgamation if the
academic bodies in the research schools could be renamed so that the
term ‘faculty’ was used only in relation to the School of General Studies,
the new Board of the Institute snubbed the proposal, declaring that the
two parts of the University were quite separate and that the change
would be too much trouble. Members of the School wanted the first residential
hall for undergraduate students to be named after the first Principal of
SGS, Burton, but their colleagues in the Institute preferred to honour the
retiring Chancellor, Bruce, perhaps in the hope (in due course realised)
that he would remember the University in his will. The advocates of
Bruce got their way, and Burton had to wait. Among members of the School the mood
was resentful. Huxley tended to be dismissive of their grievances, remarking on his
retirement that many of them ‘chose to assume the role of poor relations’.

The mutual antipathy was nowhere more evident than between the heads of the
History departments in the School of General Studies and the Research School of Social
Sciences (RSSS). Manning Clark in SGS never took kindly to rivals but so long as
Hancock was in charge of History in RSSS his resentments were largely suppressed.

Hancock was succeeded on his retirement in 1965 by John La Nauze, who came
from the Ernest Scott Chair of History at the University of Melbourne. La Nauze and
Clark were poles apart, both in their personalities and in their approaches to their
discipline. Clark by this time had published A Short History of Australia
and the first volume of his projected multi-volume history, which
offered a grand vision of Australia’s past and established his reputation as
the nation’s most controversial historian. La Nauze had just
published, in two volumes, a penetrating and elegantly written
biography of the federationist and early Prime Minister Alfred Deakin,
which promised to set the standard for Australian biographical writing.
Where Clark saw himself as an artist who wanted ‘to paint the human
heart in all its complexity’, La Nauze’s main commitment was to
rigorous professionalism in historical inquiry. Where Clark looked for
the mystery at the heart of things, La Nauze looked for technical
perfection in books, articles and theses. La Nauze was a fierce
rationalist: when a Catholic historian had asked at a conference of
historians some years earlier whether he could cite God as a cause in
history, La Nauze had passed around a blank sheet of paper with a
footnote ‘r. God’. With a cutting tongue, sharpened at high tables at
Oxford and Cambridge, he had no time for what he saw as Clark’s
sloppiness and flamboyant behaviour. Clark in turn regarded him as a ‘fact-finder’ from the company of ‘Historical Industries Proprietary Limited’.

Clark and La Nauze would have been opposites in any context. But the structure of the University widened the distance between them. After Clark’s death in 1991, his publisher Peter Ryan remembered an occasion when Clark made ‘a long, bitchy and very witty verbal assault on the Institute of Advanced Studies, all it stood for, and all who worked there’. As they strolled in the sun outside the Haydon-Allen Building, Ryan tried to placate him.

He turned and seized my arm with almost ferocious bitterness: ‘Let me put it in terms which you might understand. How would you feel if it were an Institute of Advanced Fucking, and you were left down below with all the General Fuckers?’

‘You’re the star of this campus, on any terms’, Ryan told Clark. Whether or not this was true, it seemed that the School was starting to set the pace. While the Institute continued to be responsible for admitting and examining doctoral students, the School became increasingly involved in PhD supervision. The University’s proposals for the 1964–66 triennium acknowledged SGS initiatives by arguing that there should be considerable development of postgraduate teaching and research in the School; and in 1964 the heads of the research schools decided that the Institute needed to have ‘clear and firm policy and ideas to match the increasing vigour of the School’.

Wise heads in the Institute saw the future in cooperation rather than competition. Partridge suggested that the separate development of postgraduate teaching would lead to a waste of resources which would be hard to defend. Why not make all the resources of the whole University available for postgraduate training and set up a committee to oversee informal collaboration? The natural scientists tended to see such moves as the beginning of the end. Jaeger, now Dean of Physical Sciences, pronounced that it was ‘absurd and impracticable’ for one part of the University to attempt to control the degrees of the other: ‘we seem to be involved in the obvious processes of confrontation by the S.G.S. and what seems to be a growing philosophy of appeasement by the Institute’. Oliphant urged Huxley to enforce a ‘complete separation, administratively, of Institute and School’ and to avoid compromises, which would inevitably weaken the Institute. The symbols of difference must also be maintained, including the salary differential which, according to the physicists, was ‘a clear indication of the difference between the School and the Institute and the policy of excellence in the latter’.

In the last years of Huxley’s administration, relations between the two parts of the
University reached their nadir. Crawford, when he assumed office as Vice-Chancellor, aimed to heal the breach, signalling at once his intention to get rid of the offensive name ‘School of General Studies’. The task ahead, he said, was to blend the work of the Institute and the School, so that while there was a spectrum ranging from an emphasis on research in the Institute to an emphasis on undergraduate teaching in the School, there would now be far more common ground in which research and teaching at all levels were shared. He promised to promote the unity of the University; but at the same time he undertook to maintain the structure created by the 1960 legislation, so that the identity of the research schools and the uniqueness of the Institute would not be impaired. Much of Crawford’s formidable energy was directed towards meeting these contending aims.

## Governing the University

Although the ANU was unique, the broad structure of its government was the same as other Australian universities, which in turn had drawn on British models. Its key elements, as defined in the 1946 legislation and refined in the 1960 amendments, had served the University well.

At the peak of the structure was the Council, described in the legislation as the University’s ‘governing authority’. The Act gave Council ‘the entire control and management of the affairs and concerns of the University’, while allowing it to delegate to any member or committee any or all of its powers, excepting the power to delegate and to make statutes. Like its counterparts in the state universities, Council comprised a mix of academic and lay members, some nominated, some elected and some coopted. The nominated members enabled the Commonwealth government, formally through the governor-general, to have a significant influence in University affairs. The elected members represented each house of federal parliament; the University staff; the students; and convocation, which was in turn made up of past and present members of Council, graduates of the University, and anyone else Council chose to admit through its statutes.

In the absence of a powerful professorial board, the non-academic members of Council continued to play a prominent part in the affairs of the University, probably more so than did their counterparts in any of the state institutions. This was also a legacy of the Interim Council’s influence in shaping the University over so many years. Every so often one of the academic boards complained that Council was ignoring the wishes of the academics; and Oliphant thought it objectionable in principle that non-academics should have a say in academic matters. But he, when the mood took him, was just as likely to applaud the contribution of the non-academic Coombs.

The effectiveness of Council depended more on the people who sat on it than its formal composition. The ANU was lucky to have among the non-academic members people with specific expertise or privileged access to government who could be brought into the University’s service. H.J. Goodes, for example, notwithstanding his earlier contretemps with Copland, proved a loyal friend to the University and provided
a direct line to Treasury. He served on Council (initially the Interim Council) for over twenty years. John Ewens, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Draftsman, transferred from the College Council in 1960 and remained until 1973. As well as giving expert advice on legislation, he was one of the Council workhorses, carrying the burden of demanding jobs that nobody else wanted to do. The longest-serving member, longer (by a few months) even than Coombs, was Pansy Wright who, as Sir Douglas Wright, retired in 1976, 30 years after joining the Interim Council. He remained throughout a staunch defender of the University’s interests and a forthright critic of anyone inside who failed to measure up or outside who tried to put it down.

As well as creating the Council and specifying its powers, the 1946 Act named the University’s two most senior officers, the chancellor and the vice-chancellor. The chancellor’s position was honorary and his most important functions were symbolic. A chancellor was like a coat of arms and a motto: every university had to have one.

There was symbolic significance in the fact that the first three Chancellors were based in England. The first, Lord Bruce, served for a decade, representing the University at ceremonial functions in Britain, helping out in relation to senior appointments, and occasionally visiting Canberra, where he lent status and antiquity (if not too much in the way of refinement) to the chancellor’s office. He was hard to replace: but as he approached 80 and became increasingly deaf, Council set out in earnest to identify a successor. Unable to find someone suitable in Australia, Council elected the physicist Sir John Cockcroft, who had previously been considered as a potential vice-chancellor and who was now Master of Churchill College, Cambridge. Under a new policy, Cockcroft served for the maximum four years, in two-year terms. He proved a valuable acquisition, visiting Australia regularly and helping out in Britain, especially in relation to the formation of the Research School of Chemistry. On Cockcroft’s retirement in 1965, Florey, now Lord Florey and no longer a potential director of the John Curtin School of Medical Research (JCSMR), was an obvious successor. He served diligently into the second of his two-year terms, but died in office in 1968.

Local functions of successive chancellors were performed in their absence by Coombs, first as Deputy Chairman of Council, then as Pro-Chancellor, a position created especially for him in 1959. The most important of these functions, apart from the ceremonial, was presiding at Council meetings. Coombs had other jobs which were more than ‘full-time’: he was Governor of the central bank, known as the Commonwealth Bank until 1960 and then as the Reserve Bank. But he continued to involve himself closely in University affairs, including major policy issues and appointments, and the development of the social science schools. Although his manner of speaking tended to be flat and uninspiring, he could see ahead of others to the essence of an issue, make sense of the most involved debates, and through force of argument and the information at his disposal persuade fellow councillors of the wisdom of pursuing a specific course of action. ‘He really was’, as Sawer later put it, ‘an intellectual eminence’.

On Florey’s death, Council elected Coombs to be the fourth Chancellor. The appointment coincided with his impending retirement from the Reserve Bank, and justly acknowledged his previous role as de facto resident Chancellor over so many
years. As with previous chancellors, his election was symbolic. The University, more confident of its own status in the academic and political world, had less cause to seek patronage from abroad. Coombs, the local boy who had more than once declined imperial honours, carried all the prestige and influence the University needed.

From Copland’s time onwards, the most powerful officer in the University, in terms of formal status, was the vice-chancellor, who was nominated in the Acts and Statutes as the University’s executive officer, responsible to Council for the academic and financial administration of the University. He was ex-officio a member of every faculty, board and committee, and Chairman of the Standing Committee of Council and the Professorial Board. He was formally Chairman of the boards of Graduate Studies (to 1960) and the Institute and School (from 1960), although Huxley and his successors left these responsibilities to the deputy chairmen.

The vice-chancellor’s duties evolved as the University changed, so that Crawford’s job in a University with four thousand students was vastly different from Copland’s in an institution with (initially) none. The office also adjusted to the style and personal interests of its incumbents. While every vice-chancellor could rely to an extent on the formal definition of his power and the general understanding that he was the most senior individual in the University, his real influence depended as much on personal capacity and academic prestige.

Crawford had an abundance of both. As Fiscal Adviser he had been, as he privately called himself, the University’s ‘principal “inside” rescuer’, with Coombs filling a comparable position on the ‘outside’. He accepted the appointment as Vice-Chancellor, in preference to other tempting positions, on the understanding that he was no longer to carry the main theme from the second fiddle’s chair.

Like Coombs, he was short, unassuming in manner but vastly impressive for his depth of knowledge, understanding of issues and diplomatic skills. Russell Mathews, whom we met in London in the early 1950s and who in Crawford’s time occupied various senior positions including Dean of the Faculty of Economics, listed his qualities as ‘authority, persuasiveness, reason, fairness, humanity, integrity, stubbornness, fiscal acumen, a background of scholarship and public service, academic vision and administrative capacity’. He was most impressive when taking a submission to government or the AUC for more funding, or in meetings with staff and students, where he was able to listen to all sides of a debate, sum up the feeling of the meeting, and put his own stamp on the outcome. He knew how to get the most out of people and made extensive use of the creative talent around him. He was innovative, but with a keen appreciation that innovation was subject to financial and institutional constraints. He was, to use a word just then coming into popular usage, a workaholic.

If Crawford had a fault, it was his willingness to take on too much. He was in heavy demand, especially from government and international organisations, including the World Bank. Aware of his own capacity, he insisted, both as Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies (RSPacS) and Vice-Chancellor, on his right to decide for himself how many outside activities he could handle. He was perpetually overextended, and the senior administrators often found themselves squeezed in at

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the end of a long day when he was unable to give his best. Capable of extraordinary bursts of concentration, he might achieve more in an hour than others did in a day; but those who worked with him sometimes wished he would learn how to say ‘no’.

The administrative staff had always played a major part in the development of the University. When Crawford became Vice-Chancellor in 1968, Hohnen had been on the staff for nearly twenty years, all but one of them as Registrar. Hamilton, now styled the Bursar, who had been with Copland in China, was not far behind. Many others had been at either the University or the College well before amalgamation and were destined to remain at the ANU for most of their working lives. Where many academics tended to come and go, long-serving administrators developed a strong sense of loyalty to the institution, which Hohnen in particular worked hard to encourage. They also, through knowledge of procedures and precedents, went a fair way towards making themselves indispensable.

Hohnen shared Copland’s vision of a great national institution, whose objectives had been outlined by Dedman in his second reading speech on the ANU bill and whose design had been formulated in the first half dozen or so years of its existence. He pursued this vision energetically, almost relentlessly. Forthright in speech and occasionally overbearing in manner, he was (to borrow a phrase he used of Copland) ‘a boots and spurs man’. At the same time, he perceived the University as a close-knit family, in which the administration played a paternal role, as much concerned with the domestic welfare of staff and students as with their academic needs. He believed that administrators should do everything they could to create an appropriate environment for productive research (which was not the same as Florey’s notion of administrators as the academics’ unseen and obedient servants). His door in the old Administrative Building and later in the Chancellery (a term which he borrowed for the purpose) was always open, and he, Hamilton and other senior administrators were often seen talking with academic staff in other buildings across the campus.

There is always a fine line between the creation of policies and their execution. The bald description of the Registrar as secretary to Council and head of the University’s administrative structure might suggest that he was a mere functionary, without a significant creative role. In fact, Hohnen assumed responsibilities which gave himself and those directly under him a major part in the making of the University. He was largely responsible for the University’s housing scheme, without which it would have been impossible in the early years to attract and retain staff. He recruited the furniture designer Frederick Ward, whose designs lent dignity and elegance to University House. He contributed to major academic initiatives, including the Australian Dictionary of Biography and the Research School of Chemistry.

Hohnen’s influence varied according to his working relationship with successive vice-chancellors. He and Copland worked as one, united in their understanding of the University’s objectives and how to achieve them. By contrast, Melville’s restrained approach was somewhat inhibiting and more to the liking of the Bursar, Hamilton, who admired his overall command of the University’s finances, his shrewdness and humanity. Huxley, more inclined to delegate than his predecessor and with more
occasion to do so, made the Registrar formally responsible for correspondence on administrative and policy matters, and for negotiations with government and the AUC.

When Crawford became Vice-Chancellor, the University’s administrative culture changed significantly, partly as a result of the continuing growth in staff and student numbers and partly because he believed the vice-chancellor should retain firm control over all aspects of administration. His years as Fiscal Adviser and Director of RSPacS had given him a clear view of how the administration worked; and in the months before he took office as Vice-Chancellor, he worked with Hohnen to plan major administrative changes. These were part of his larger efforts to bring about a greater sense of unity in the University. The old positions of Registrar of the Institute and Registrar of the School of General Studies were abandoned in favour of a single structure, with the duties of senior officers being determined by their administrative function rather than by their responsibility to one of the University’s two academic divisions.

The other major ingredient of these changes was a clearer distinction between academic and administrative activities. To assist him on the academic side (and at the same time enhance the status of SGS), Crawford asked Council to appoint a full-time Deputy Vice-Chancellor in place of the part-time deputies of previous years. Noel Dunbar, Professor of Physics in SGS, was appointed to this position and acted for Crawford during his frequent absences from Canberra. Crawford strengthened the administrative side by extending Hohnen’s responsibility under the vice-chancellor for the whole administrative structure, while distancing himself from day to day administrative routines. At the same time he specified that the senior administrative officer, now styled Secretary to the University, should have no responsibility for policy formulation in relation to teaching and research. That was a job for the academics.

Outside the Chancelry, the academic government of the University took place at the faculty, research school and departmental level. The structure of the School of General Studies resembled that of most of the state universities, where the main academic divisions were faculties and departments. At amalgamation, the University inherited from the College four faculties—Arts, Economics, Law and Science—plus a School of Oriental Studies, which soon became a faculty. The faculties or elected faculty boards had responsibilities relating to staff appointments, student admissions, degree structures, and other policy and administrative matters. Each faculty was chaired by an elected dean, who executed policies determined by faculty or faculty board and represented the faculty on School and University boards and committees. The powers of a dean in SGS were modest, especially in contrast to their counterparts in some of the new state universities, where deans controlled large portions of the university budget.

Much real power in SGS resided in the departments. The main formal recognition of the department was in the conditions of appointment of professors, which referred to their responsibilities as departmental heads. A head of department was expected to exercise leadership in relation to research and teaching, but the nature of that leadership was rarely defined. Whether a department was authoritarian or democratic in its workings depended largely on the personality of the professor who ran it. In the mid-1960s the Staff Association was questioning whether professors should remain
heads indefinitely and suggesting that there should occasionally be departmental meetings. But for some time yet, until students started to insist on a say in university affairs, the head of department could play God, if he had a mind to do so.

Departmental autonomy was also a common ingredient in the government of the four original research schools. (The new Research School of Chemistry put into practice the revolutionary notion of having no departments.) Beyond that they differed significantly, especially between the social science and natural science schools. The social scientists, with their faculties and faculty boards, enjoyed a degree of democracy which the early deans and directors upheld. In the natural science schools, the professors successfully resisted the formation of faculty structures, retaining power in their own hands and exercising it through school committees, comprising only the director or dean and themselves.

Oliphant continued as Director of the Research School of Physical Sciences (RSPhysS) until 1963 when, weary of the administrative burden and weighed down by problems with his own projects, he withdrew to the back bench as a professor in the school. In the early years he had resisted any suggestion of sharing power: when there was talk of recruiting the distinguished physicist Harrie Massey in the late 1940s, he offered to resign rather than contemplate any possible weakening of the Director’s authority. But the men whom Oliphant appointed to the first chairs—Titterton and Jaeger—were no shrinking violets, and nor was Woolley; and when Oliphant attempted to influence research directions in departments other than his own, as he did in the case of Geophysics, they were inclined to resist. Like it or not, Oliphant saw his powers receding in favour of an oligarchy, in which he was acknowledged with mixed enthusiasm as the most senior member.

Oliphant’s resignation as Director introduced a period of prolonged uncertainty about the headship of the Physical Sciences school. After consulting Oliphant, Coombs and a small group of fellow councillors concluded that in view of the diverse nature of research in RSPhysS and the strong sense of departmental identity, there was little chance of finding a person who would be able to exercise intellectual leadership. Best, therefore, to appoint a dean, as in the other schools, and to emphasise the administrative responsibilities of the position. Jaeger was asked to fulfil this role, which he did reluctantly and on the understanding that he should not interfere in the work of individual departments.

As RSPhysS grew, so its unity diminished. By 1965 Coombs and his colleagues were alarmed that it was swallowing 40 per cent of the Institute’s overall budget and growing at the expense of the other schools. At the same time Jaeger was referring ominously to ‘an unwieldy complex of departments which were frustrated because they could not expand’ and pressuring, as he had done for some years, for a separate school of earth sciences. Reversing an earlier decision, Coombs and his committee now decided that the school needed a permanent director, appointed from outside the University, who would plan and direct the work of the school over a period of at least seven years. As nobody could be found, and as Jaeger made it clear that he had had enough, Council decided that Titterton should be appointed for three years as Dean.

Even the most astute administrator (which Titterton wasn’t) would have found the
growing tensions within the school hard to manage. As pressure for resources increased, departments became ‘pot-bond’, as Jaeger put it, and more competitive with one another. There were fissiparous tendencies, in the form of continuing pressure from the geophysicists, the mathematicians and the astronomers to break away from Physical Sciences and create new schools of their own. Then there was pressure from staff, many of them quite senior, who were becoming increasingly frustrated that they played no part in school decision-making. Democracy asserted itself in 1967 when the academic staff met to express their ‘genuine and deep dissatisfaction’ with the RSPSS school committee and some heads of departments, and to ask the Vice-Chancellor to do something about the school’s administrative structure. Ironically Oliphant, no longer a head of department but still the school’s most senior member of staff, consented to chair the meeting and carry the people’s demands to the Vice-Chancellor. One way or another, something had to give; the only question was when.

The story was similar in the John Curtin School, where the notion of God Professor extended beyond Olympian heights. From time to time after Florey’s resignation as Adviser to the school, the professors discussed the chances of importing a distinguished scientist to direct them. On each occasion they concluded that nobody of sufficient distinction would be attracted to a position which offered, now that the school was well established, so little room for opening up new areas of research. Within the school, Eccles was acknowledged as the outstanding scientist; but he had neither the desire nor the administrative capacity to run it. So Ennor remained as Dean, willingly accepted for his skills as an administrator, but only on the understanding that he did not try to tell the others what to do. After a series of temporary appointments, in 1962 he was offered the deanship on a more or less permanent basis.

Departments were regarded as sancrosanct, a perception encouraged by the shape of the John Curtin School building. When Eccles complained to his colleagues that a member of another department had brought strangers into his wing without first asking permission, there were nods of agreement that this should not happen again. Albert worked hard to convert his kingdom of Medical Chemistry into an empire, inhabiting what Ennor and Eccles called a ‘palace’ that was vastly larger than Florey ever intended. He fiercely resisted encroachments, specifically by a nominee of Wright, Frank Dwyer, whose research in biological inorganic chemistry was proving embarrassingly successful.

Research in the departments continued to thrive, but the school as a whole began to suffer from a lack of long-term planning. By the mid-1960s most of the departments were reaching their complement of staff and the school’s building was full. There was little room for variations on the existing pattern. With the impending retirement of some of the senior professors, Wright warned Florey that the school was running down. This was unduly alarmist: but increasingly members of staff were wondering where the school was headed.

As in the Physical Sciences school, there were rumblings among the ‘other ranks’. Through the Staff Association and at meetings convened for the purpose, they pressed for regular departmental meetings and the creation of a faculty structure, with appropriate representation for all academic staff. Ennor, supported by most of the
school committee for JCSMR, firmly resisted, arguing that there was no problem of
government that existing arrangements could not handle.

Ennor was now Deputy Vice-Chancellor; and as Huxley approached retirement, he
set his sights on the top job. But there was growing resistance among academic staff
to what they perceived to be his autocratic style. As the selection committee prepared
to meet, with Florey (on his first visit as Chancellor) in the chair, a group of social
scientists organised a petition to draft Coombs to the position, partly as a means of
keeping Ennor out. Petition in hand, Bob Gollan strolled over to the John Curtin
School, where he explained the move to half a dozen or so of the most senior staff and
asked what they thought of Ennor. After a long pause, Bede Morris, a Professorial
Fellow in Experimental Pathology, replied in words that cannot be printed. ‘Have you
told Florey that?’ asked Gollan. Morris replied that he had, in the same words.

Coombs declined to stand, but Florey helped persuade Crawford to let his name go
forward. This left the selection committee with three strong candidates, Ennor,
Crawford and an outsider from Melbourne. Ennor was liked by politicians and would
no doubt serve the University well in its relations with government; but Coombs
reminded his five colleagues on the committee that they also had to satisfy another
‘electorate’, the academic body, which might not respect Ennor’s judgement. The two
medical scientists on the committee were more blunt. Wright dismissed Ennor on the
grounds that he had given up his science and that he believed in regulating the
academic community through the rule of law. Florey remarked that few of Ennor’s
colleagues would speak well of him and that there would be a good deal of resistance
to his nomination. These comments alone might not have kept Ennor out of the vice-
chancellorship, but they certainly helped tip the balance in Crawford’s favour.

We can only guess how much Florey was influenced by Bede Morris’s unprintable
opinion of Ennor, or by Florey’s own experiences in Oxford nearly a decade earlier.
What is clear is that the staff of the University were demanding a voice in its
government and that, more obviously than before, the vice-chancellor would have to
possess their confidence. Ennor had no time for consultation and showed little respect
for contrary opinions. His administrative style was characterised by a comment he
had once made to Florey about one of the University architects: ‘at times one must
pick up the first weapon that lies at hand in the hope that somebody may be beaten
down into a submissive state’. In the early years of the ANU, when the main task was
to get things done, this uncompromising approach had much value. But by the time
he was a candidate for the vice-chancellor’s position, confrontation had no place as an
instrument of University government.

Several months after Council announced Crawford’s appointment, Ennor suffered
another blow when a meeting of the academic staff in the John Curtin School voted,
against his express wishes, in favour of a faculty structure and asked him to convey the
resolution to Council. Turned down for the vice-chancellorship and now defied in his
own school, Ennor ‘got the huff’, as Wright put it, ‘and sought comfort in the bosom of
John Gorton’, the Minister for Education and Science. Gorton appointed him to head
his new department, where a later Science minister, Labor’s Bill Morrison, dubbed him
‘Sir Huge Error’, for reasons that may find a place in someone else’s history.

In response to the revolt in JCSMR, Huxley, as one of his last acts as Vice-Chancellor, proposed a formal inquiry into the government of the school. Crawford followed through, appointing a committee chaired by an ‘outsider’, David Bensusan-Butt, an economist from Pacific Studies and former British civil servant, who had a keen appreciation of how institutions work. Butt and his colleagues did a thorough job, looking closely into existing arrangements in JCSMR, and making recommendations which related to all the research schools. They knew, as Ennor evidently did not, that ‘Academics share the normal human characteristics of disliking having decisions affecting themselves taken over their heads ... They like to have a right to have their say (whether they use it or not), and to be consulted (even though sometimes they may have little to offer).’ Endorsing the ‘ancient ideal of a University as a self-governing community of scholars’, the committee proposed that the John Curtin School immediately introduce a faculty structure, comprising a faculty and faculty board. The faculty, which would meet at least once a term, would offer a forum for all members of the academic staff to air their views and hear about policy developments throughout the school and the University. The faculty board, comprising the head of school, the heads of departments and a limited number of staff representatives, would make decisions about general matters of academic policy, as well as appointments, promotions and financial management. It would be small enough to avoid becoming ‘infested by chatterboxes’ (a problem which might overtake faculty as a whole), yet large enough to avoid ‘a detestable feeling of professors versus plebs’.

The committee concluded that the head of school should continue to have wide-ranging powers, including final responsibility for the school budget, the opportunity for independent confidential discussion with the vice-chancellor on any school or Institute matter, and the right to determine issues that were too urgent or personal to present to faculty board. These should give the holder of the office ‘ample scope for creative leadership’, provided that it was exercised by persuasion and consultation rather than command.

Members of JCSMR welcomed the report, almost with a sense of relief that past troubles were now behind them. The faculty structure was adopted, and after an interregnum, Frank Fenner was appointed head of school, the first to hold the title Director. Although he had never shown much enthusiasm for administration, Fenner’s academic credentials were outstanding. He knew the school and its problems, and having been a member of the Butt committee, he knew what the staff expected in a head. Enjoying their confidence, as well as that of the new Vice-Chancellor, he looked forward to offering firm and creative leadership within the new faculty structure.

In Physical Sciences, too, the Butt report was greeted enthusiastically by the other ranks. Titterton thought it was an excellent report, full of sound commonsense, and moved immediately to give it effect. Not everyone was happy: Jaeger and Olin Eggen, the head of Mount Stromlo, strongly resisted enlarging the present school committee, and tried to have the matter deferred. But Titterton had support from above and below, so the diehards were dragged reluctantly into the new era of democracy.
Lost vistas: although Denis Winston and Grenfell Rudduck changed much of Brian Lewis’s plan for the University, they retained his emphasis on the ceremonial point at the front of University House, overlooking the lake. These views from the early 1960s capture something of Lewis’s original vision.
A new orientation

Brian Lewis, the University’s first architect, was gone. Even before he fell out with the University in 1953, his grand plan had been left to languish, never quite accepted and never entirely rejected. Temporary structures remained along the Acton ridge, and were added to without reference to his plan, so that his favoured site increasingly resembled an odd assortment of disconnected buildings.

In his place, the University appointed another academic architect, Denis Winston, Professor of Town and Country Planning at the University of Sydney, and Grenfell Rudduck, a senior member of the Commonwealth Department of National Development, whose association with the University dated from 1947 when he was appointed a Social Science Research Fellow. Winston and Rudduck were pragmatic planners, more concerned with the functional requirements of buildings and the relationships between them than with the aesthetic composition of buildings and landscape. They also held that existing developments of value (which presumably included some of the old hospital buildings) should be retained wherever practicable. Rather than focusing, as Lewis had done, on the overall site plan, they emphasised the needs of the individual research schools, arguing that each group of buildings should have plenty of room to expand ‘without having to conform rigidly to a pre-conceived architectural scheme for the whole University’. Where Lewis had arranged the University along a dominant geographical feature and had sketched in less than half the available acreage, they looked towards developing the whole site. This left them free to consider locating the library and the social science buildings off the ridge, behind and to the side of University House, and to imagine new developments stretching towards University Avenue. While they retained a concentration of buildings along the ridge, they abandoned Lewis’s symmetry. But they restated his emphasis on the high, southeastern end of the axis, where they placed a tower, a great hall, an art gallery and a theatre, all commanding a splendid vista over the west basin of the proposed lake.

So well before amalgamation, the University on paper had started moving down the hill towards University Avenue and the site assigned to Canberra University College. Amalgamation confirmed the process. At the time of the merger, Winston was the University’s only site consultant, Rudduck having resigned some years earlier. Winston was also site consultant for the College, the first elements of which were starting to appear on the landscape. Now the two plans were brought together, and Winston was given a fresh commission to prepare a site plan for the new, expanded campus. As his earlier plans for the College were quite in keeping with his ideas for the University, the architectural merger proceeded a good deal more harmoniously than the academic one.

Winston’s composite plan guided the University during most of the 1960s and fixed the location of over a dozen major buildings, including the Chancelry, the SGS library, the (old) student Union, the residential college, and buildings for most of the teaching faculties. As there was still plenty of room for growth, and as Winston made generous provision for each academic and administrative centre, members of the University
tended to accept his ideas uncritically and focus on their specific building needs. The main challenges to the site plan came from the authority responsible for the planning of Canberra, the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), which engaged in a process referred to by a University administrator as 'filching University land' to provide more room for business growth in the city centre and allow for arterial road developments. Under intense pressure to negotiate a new perpetual lease, Council yielded the equivalent of several blocks facing the city near University Avenue. But it stood firm against proposals for a western distributor, which threatened under one proposal to cut a swathe between the social sciences building, then under construction, and Canberra High School (later the Canberra School of Art). From these prolonged and sometimes heated exchanges with the NCDC, the University administration learnt that a 'lease in perpetuity' was only as perpetual as successive governments were prepared to concede and the University was determined to defend.

By the late 1960s the ANU was growing at a pace which seemed to be leaving Winston’s plans some distance behind. The main problems related to the School of General Studies, where he had adopted much the same approach as he had done for the Institute by giving precedence to the parts over the whole. Rudduck, his erstwhile collaborator and now an Associate Commissioner with the NCDC and a member of Council's Buildings and Grounds Committee, warned in 1961 that a teaching institution, unlike the research schools, needed to be compact. By contrast, Winston’s dispersed approach was likely to produce 'one of the most inconvenient Universities in Australia', with students having to drive from their halls of residence to the Union or library, and from one lecture to the next. Those fears were perhaps exaggerated. Yet traffic and parking problems would soon take priority over matters relating to the overall appearance of the campus.

Unlike some of the newer universities, such as Macquarie, Flinders and La Trobe, the buildings at the ANU did not conform to a single architectural style. Florey and Oliphant had set the pattern of divergence when they insisted that the functional needs of each research school should take precedence over any architect’s grand notions. As the University grew, the demands of research continued to influence the shape of buildings and the overall appearance of the campus, most obviously at the western extremity of the Acton ridge, where a tower to accommodate a new nuclear accelerator ('Titterton’s tower', jovially known at the time as ‘Ernie's erection’) rose several storeys above the other physics buildings nearby.

Even where the functional requirements of buildings were fairly straightforward, academics often played a major part in planning their design. The contest between Davidson and Hancock over the shape of the H.C. Coombs Building had little to do with the overall design of the ANU. So long as the social scientists were located opposite the library, larger planning questions rarely concerned them. In common with their colleagues across the campus, their approach to building design was parochial. While in the Coombs Building they achieved a building of distinction (or, at least, a distinctive one), it did nothing to help portray the University as a single entity with a single culture.

Architectural diversity was also encouraged by official policy. In the late 1950s Council’s Buildings and Grounds committee was chaired by Warren McDonald, a
leading figure in the construction industry, who proposed that the University, as a public body, should give as many architectural firms as possible the opportunity to compete for commissions. As a result, nearly every new construction project through to the late 1960s had a new architect, each with his own style and each keen to produce something distinctive.

The combined effect of these influences for diversity was incoherence, to the extent that the distinguished architect and architectural critic Robin Boyd (who himself designed with others the Zoology building, opened in 1964) described the campus as Disneyland and discussed it in a chapter entitled ‘The descent into chaos’ in his book *The Australian Ugliness*. On the other hand, the ANU avoided the New Brutalism in architecture which characterised at least one other Australian campus (Macquarie) established during the 1960s. In the absence of a unifying architectural theme, the University looked to landscape design to provide coherence. Guided by the Professor of Botany, Lindsay Pryor, gardeners planted trees and shrubs across the campus, adding to the existing stock of exotics but emphasising natives against the backdrop of Black Mountain. Their success was such that, notwithstanding Boyd, the ANU became widely regarded as one of the most attractive campuses in Australia.

While the trees were growing, Council’s Buildings and Grounds Committee decided in 1967 that something had to be done to restore order and unity to the site plan. To achieve this the University appointed a full-time site planner, Roy Simpson of Yuncken Freeman Architects, who was noted for his capacity to bring ‘aesthetically exciting solutions’ to practical planning needs.

In his preliminary assessment of the University’s character, Simpson tactfully acknowledged that its better parts were a ‘highly attractive recording of the University’s evolution in a way that is uniquely Australian’. But he also observed that its less attractive parts highlighted the dangers of a ‘permissive and adaptive’ planning approach which, if pursued further, could lead to a dull and inefficient suburban scatter, lacking the visionary qualities expected of a National University. Obviously, existing buildings could not be swept aside. The task now was to conserve and integrate the University’s assets of character and capital investment.

Simpson’s solutions were decisive. First, halt the scatter, concentrating new buildings in four functional groups (the School of General Studies; undergraduate residences; the Institute of Advanced Studies and the ceremonial group) and seeking aesthetic cohesion within each group and significant connections between the groups. Next, maximise the open spaces between the groups, remove (temporary) buildings and roads that impede the contrast between the groups, and improve the road pattern to segregate vehicles and pedestrians. Finally, integrate the internal road system and points of entry with adjacent civic traffic arrangements. While acknowledging claims for individual creativity and freedom of architectural expression, Simpson argued for overall discipline: ‘site planning is one of the areas in which a University should speak with one voice’.

In one dramatic gesture, Simpson recognised the University’s shifting centre of gravity and confirmed the movement to the north. In the existing plan, the proposed ceremonial group looked over the lake in ‘monumental isolation’, removed from the
University’s day to day activities. Simpson proposed relocating the main elements of this group, including an auditorium, exhibition building and other public entertainment areas, to the eastern end of University Avenue, which would be developed as a pedestrian precinct and ‘the main spine of undergraduate activities’. Here, near the centre of undergraduate activity and where the University faced the city, the ceremonial group would provide ‘a striking and appropriate theme for the main gateway to the University, merging town and gown with considerable drama’.

And what should happen to Acton ridge? Simpson agreed with his predecessors that the eastern end demanded special treatment: but the place of the ridge in the geometry of the national capital was so important that underdevelopment would be worse than no development at all. As there was no obvious building waiting to occupy the site, best to tidy it up as parkland and leave it to later generations to build on, as and when they should see fit. He conceded that the relocation was a great sacrifice:

I would be tempted to sell my soul for the commission for a really monumental complex poised on this lovely ridge, amidst great sweeps of idealised landscape stepping up from the lake’s edge. Consequently, my advocacy of another possibility has been no emotional whim, but has grown out of serious doubts as to whether the great vision is an attainable one. So often one gets caught in tides of enthusiasm, only to find the dreams left stranded amongst the kelp and the painful realisation that great splendour cannot be achieved through inadequate resources.

... This country is littered with the pathetic evidence of impoverished attempts at grandeur. We talk bravely of Versailles—and achieve suburbia. I would like to protect the University from such a result.

So Simpson looked for and found a site where magnificent scale was not obligatory, and where quality could be achieved at reasonable cost.

Few people seem to have appreciated the full significance of the relocation. One who did was Frank Fenner, who asked the planner why he had sited the Great Hall in the heart of the undergraduate area and as far as possible from the main mass of the Institute, which gave the ANU its distinctive quality.

‘Where is the “main mass”?’ Simpson replied. The Institute was already creeping in towards University Avenue. In any case, did the question matter? The Vice-Chancellor, Crawford, was keen to express the unity of the University as a whole; hence the Great Hall should be situated where it was likely to enhance the campus as a whole, both functionally and aesthetically. The issue was clear cut: ‘Is the Great Hall to be built to the glory of advanced research, or as one of the refinements of higher education?’

So Simpson put the Institute in its place as part of ‘a transcendent unity’ and gave the University a new orientation. Or did he merely give architectural expression to shifts in direction, both physical and philosophical, that had already taken place? The University in 1970, when Council accepted the essence of his proposals, was quite different from the one imagined by Lewis and the planners of the 1940s. Lewis had
planned for four research schools and an academic population of 400 in an institution dedicated to research and postgraduate training. When Simpson started work, there were some eight hundred research and teaching staff, and over four thousand students, five-sixths of whom were undergraduates. The University was in two parts, but the Vice-Chancellor’s declared objective was to make it one.

Simpson also assimilated and expressed changing perspectives about the University’s identity in relation to the outside world. At the time of its foundation and for many years thereafter, the University had looked abroad for guidance and inspiration, and specifically to Oxford and Cambridge, which stood out in the world of learning much as the Australian National University was intended to dominate Acton ridge, obediently to Walter Burley Griffin’s grand design but largely oblivious to the neighbouring community. Simpson turned the University towards the city centre, creating a significant point of arrival which served both the University and the people of Canberra.

But if he translated the University’s new orientation to architectural sketches, Simpson also recognised that it might again change direction, requiring corresponding adjustments to the development plan. ‘Growth and time’, he pointed out in his report, ‘bring changes of physical needs and philosophical approach’. Just as Coombs was reflecting in 1970 on how institutions could deviate from the intentions of their founders (leaving some at least of their dreams ‘stranded amongst the kelp’), the site planner was warning that nobody could accurately predict all the University’s needs in future years. His plans were plans for the time, which had to allow for future adaptation. Council took the hint, accepting the essence of his proposals as the development plan ‘for the foreseeable future’, but introducing at his suggestion the notion of continuous planning. Henceforth the site plan would be subject to revision, perhaps at triennial intervals.
The University's shifts in direction left some casualties. One was the relationship to Griffin's water axis and the opportunity to develop the commanding position looking over the lake. Simpson appreciated the potential, imagining a complex of buildings arranged in the manner (but not the style) of a medieval fortification. But as there was no urgent practical need to develop the site, he left it to an uncertain future. At least the vista along University Avenue towards City Hill acknowledged a significant element of Griffin's original design.

At the other end of the ridge, the Physical Sciences and Medical Research schools were becoming increasingly remote from the rest of the campus. They were some ten minutes' walk from the SGS library, which Simpson calculated to be the centre of gravity for undergraduate teaching, and even further from the proposed Great Hall and entrance plaza. As members of both these schools tended more than their colleagues in the social sciences to keep to themselves, they were not too concerned about their growing isolation. What suffered was not so much the individual schools as the understanding that the University was, or ought to be, a single entity.

The main casualty was University House. The world of Oxford and Cambridge that Hancock, Trendall and others had sought to evoke seemed increasingly irrelevant to where the University was headed. Trendall, as he approached retirement in 1968, told his old friend Crocker, who was now Australian Ambassador in Rome, that he felt sad at heart about what was happening to the ANU. His hopes for a university where mature scholars might pursue their research in peace and freedom from the chores that beset 'the ordinary professors' and where they might influence young minds had long since evaporated; and the pressure for integration of the School and the Institute threatened to destroy the University's distinctive character. Now he saw declining standards among the professoriate and a relentless pursuit of mediocrity: 'it is noticeable that not one of the present hierarchy from the Chancellor himself down to the Registrar has either an Oxford or a Cambridge degree'.

University House was having financial problems. As it received a large University subsidy for services to the campus as a whole, Crawford asked questions about value for money, pointing out that there was now an external observer, the Australian Universities Commission, that had to be satisfied as well. Trendall was told how much more revenue the House could get by developing the bar trade, opening a bistro beneath the hall, and 'generally vamping the place up', without any consideration of what it might lose. The opponents of high table and the traditions it represented were becoming increasingly vocal. Trendall knew several people who expected the present 'stuffy' regime to be replaced by something more in keeping with modern trends. The time had come, he told Crocker, for him to go.

The role of University House on the changing campus had to be redefined. This task was left to Trendall's successor, Sir Rutherford Robertson, and his fellow members of the governing body who, as they strolled across from other parts of the campus to discuss the future of the House, were likely to approach from the side or the rear: for University House, which once looked towards Lewis's fountain at the gateway of the University, was now facing the wrong direction.