A new era

Low at the helm

The sudden departure of Robert Williams for New Zealand early in 1975 left the University without a vice-chancellor or an obvious successor. After a bumpy electoral process, during which each day’s deliberations of the electoral committee mysteriously found their way into the following morning’s Canberra Times, Council invited Anthony Low, Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies, to take on the job.

Low had two large assets. First, he was a known quantity. Although he had been in RSPacS for just two years, he had proven himself a capable and popular Director, and had managed to overcome some initial discomfort within the school that he had been appointed without sufficient consultation and that his research interests were some distance from the Pacific. Second, his reputation and perspective were truly international. Born in India, he had read Modern History at Oxford before going to Makerere College in the University College of East Africa in 1951. After nine years in Uganda, during which he was East African correspondent for the London Times and the Round Table, he joined the ANU, where we met him as a member of Hancock’s Department of History in RSSS. In 1964 he was appointed to a chair at the University of Sussex, where he set up the School of African and Asian Studies and later took charge of graduate education in Arts and Social Sciences. After a year at Clare Hall, Cambridge, he returned to Canberra in 1973. When he took up the vice-chancellorship in May 1975, he was nearly 48 years of age.

If Hancock could be seen as captain of a cricket team, Low can be imagined standing confidently at the helm of an ocean liner, moving sedately between countries and continents (especially England, East Africa, India and Australia). Tall and upright, with an urbane and engaging manner, he spent many hours at the captain’s table educating key politicians and public servants about the ANU’s contribution to the nation. Where Hancock made a virtue of his research school and department remaining small, Low was comfortable with a large and diverse crew. Hancock was most at home in the seminar; Low, while equally confident in that setting, welcomed the opportunity to address the whole University, either at graduation ceremonies, or at open meetings of staff and students. Five times during his seven-year term, he delivered ‘Reports to the University’ in the H.C. Coombs Lecture Theatre, where he spoke proudly (for external as well as internal consumption) of the University’s recent achievements, expounded his vision of where it was headed, and pointed to obstacles in its path. Like Hancock, Low had a way with words, both orally and on paper, including dextrous use of the telling phrase or...
metaphor. He had the historian’s skill of creating order out of chaos, and his reports to the University were masterly syntheses. They were also reports for posterity: no other vice-chancellor, before or since, has so eloquently summed up the University during his tenure or so persuasively presented his part in its history.

Addressing a graduation ceremony in September 1975, Low declared that the University was at the start of a new era. The years of expansion were over, and now universities generally looked forward to a period of limited growth. No longer, he said, could the ANU meet so many of its problems, as it had lately tended to do, by making allocations from new resources. Now it would be necessary to trim, cut and even delete: but it would also be essential to take new initiatives and to avoid any slump in morale. The culture of the institution had to change, and Low was confident that with positive and imaginative thinking it could do so.

Apart from alerting the University to its changing circumstances, there were advantages (which Low did not mention) in distancing the institution from its recent past. The truncated term of Williams as Vice-Chancellor had been the least happy in the University’s experience, characterised by student assaults on the Chancery and a general impression on and off campus that the administration did not know where it was headed. Low wanted a new beginning, in which the Vice-Chancellor would be ‘making the running’. That meant that he should ‘climb the next hill, and point up the contours of some of the things I see in the middle distance’, and plot the route ahead (though he emphasised that he would not be giving the University its marching orders). It also meant that he would not be yielding precedence to the old guard of Coombs and Crawford, either or both of whom had been a dominant presence ever since the days of Copland. Shortly after taking up duty, he steeled himself for a private lunch with Coombs at which he politely conveyed the firm message that he intended from time to time to consult him in his position as Chancellor, but that he as Vice-Chancellor was the University’s chief executive officer and that he did not wish Coombs to go over his head, as he had done with Williams. The injunction was probably unnecessary, as Coombs never intervened unless there was need. But Low was pleased to have set the rules, and pleased too that he and the Chancellor remained good friends.

In 1976 Coombs retired as Chancellor, ending nearly 24 years of continuous service as the local representative of chancellors or as Chancellor himself, and was succeeded by Crawford. With Crawford too, Low was careful to retain the initiative, always ensuring that he called on the Chancellor to discuss any issue, rather than having the Chancellor call on him. Crawford remained influential, both through the value people attached to his opinions and by chairing meetings of Council (often an onerous task); yet although at least once in coming years his role was decisive, the functions of chancellor were henceforth, as in most other universities, chiefly confined to presiding at Council and at graduation ceremonies.

Changes within the higher education system also suggested the beginnings of a new era. In 1974 the Labor government assumed full financial responsibility for higher education. While the ANU remained the only university established by an Act of the federal parliament, now it was just one of nineteen universities (including Deakin,
inaugurated in that year) funded by the Commonwealth. Henceforth, it would have to take its place in the queue. It also became part of a wider higher education system administered by the Commonwealth. The Whitlam government set up three commissions responsible for funding the three sectors of post-secondary education: the universities, the colleges of advanced education and the colleges of technical and further education. Then the Fraser government constituted a single Tertiary Education Commission, responsible for all three areas. Under both governments there were in effect three queues, all competing for limited resources.

Owing to the unique status of the Institute, the ANU received the most funding; but how long would that last? As old universities became increasingly involved in postgraduate training, and new universities created as a result of the Murray Report joined them, the ANU’s proportion of postgraduate students declined, so that where in the early 1960s it produced over 20 per cent of PhD graduates, reaching a peak of 27.5 per cent in 1964, by the late 1970s the figure had fallen to around 15 per cent. The trend was especially evident in the social sciences and humanities, where the ANU’s share fell during the same period from over 50 per cent to around 20 per cent. Increasingly, the University looked to new ways of asserting its uniqueness and demonstrating that it paid its way.

When Low took office, students were already less strident than they had been, the great causes of representation and continuous assessment having given way to demands, equally urgent but more mundane, for cheaper accommodation. Low, who had first-hand experience of student turbulence in England, took no chances: recognising that Colin Plowman had ‘the best antennae in the business’, he retrieved him from the University of New South Wales as Assistant Vice-Chancellor, with a brief to look after the students. Owing partly to Plowman’s presence, but more to the larger changes affecting them, student unrest quickly ceased to be a major problem.

But the Troubles had left their mark. Within the University they bequeathed distrust between staff and students, hard to define but nevertheless palpable. And they helped diminish the status of the University in the wider community. This trend was by no means confined to the ANU, or even to Australia. Returning from a congress of Commonwealth vice-chancellors held in New Zealand early in 1976, Low reported on growing public hostility towards universities, especially in Britain and Canada, and predicted that Australia would not be far behind. Nor was it limited to the teaching functions of universities: about the same time, Arthur Birch was commenting on the ‘public disenchantment with research’.

Then in 1977 a conservative journalist, Peter Samuel, launched a scathing attack in the Bulletin on ‘The scandal of our universities’, in which he denounced the ‘tertiary education industry’ as an ‘appalling waste of taxpayers’ money’. Occasionally, he said, the universities did some excellent work, but by and large they were ‘drab, unproductive institutions’, populated by ‘drones and parasites’, characterised by ‘internal intrigue and vicious-infighting’, and susceptible to takeover by ‘intolerant, illiberal, irrational minorities’. While the colleges of advanced education received the most severe drubbing, Samuel also cited some of the more arcane examples of research at the ANU as instances of overspecialisation, which, he suggested, implied a tendency to award promotions within the confines of a tiny clique rather than on the basis of scholarly excellence.
Whatever the rights or wrongs of Samuel’s comments (and some of them were wild), they signalled that the universities, once largely immune from public criticism, would henceforth be fair game.

The change of government did not help. Academics and students responded fervently to Whitlam’s appeal to ‘maintain the rage’ over his sacking, and protested, sometimes violently, whenever his successor, Malcolm Fraser, stepped onto a university campus. The coalition government regarded the universities as broadly unsympathetic, and showed signs of wanting to bring them into line.

As usual, the ANU, close at hand and federally funded, was vulnerable, especially since so many of its staff were prominent supporters of the previous government and outspoken critics of the new one. Low himself was angry about the Whitlam government’s dismissal. A television camera caught him among the crowd protesting outside Parliament House, which was probably unfortunate for the University’s relations with the incoming government, and his own relations with those people on campus who welcomed Whitlam’s sacking; but Low, always his own man, was unrepentant. One of the University’s most forthright and best-known protesters was Manning Clark, who had an unsurpassed talent for getting up conservative nostrils. Writing for Meanjin magazine, Clark dismissed the Fraser government as ‘a group of men who had the moral values of a troop of Boy Scouts, and the economic and social values which were rapidly disappearing off the face of the earth’, and suggested that future historians might deal harshly with the Governor-General who had dismissed Whitlam. When a government Senator, after mangling the comment about the Governor-General, implied that Clark was unfit to sit on University appointment committees or examine theses, and the Minister for Education, Senator John Carrick, joined in the attack, Low politely but firmly accused the Minister of impugning Clark’s scholarly integrity. The University and academic freedom were well defended, but the risks of government interference remained great.

The prospect became an unpleasant reality in 1979 when the government, responding to pressure from Liberal students, attempted to ensure that none of the income from the General Services Fee, which was paid by every student, reached left-wing student organisations, specifically the Australian Union of Students. Council prepared a statute to deal with the matter. The government rejected it, as had never before happened to a statute, and proposed instead to amend the ANU Act so as to abolish all compulsory fees. Low decided it was time to bring Crawford into the battle; and after a vigorous public debate, the government agreed to a strategy whereby the
fee would remain compulsory, but students could choose whether or not to join local organisations including the Students’ Association, and the money could be directed only to organisations approved by the government. The specific issue ceased to be important, as the question of government interference dominated Council debates. From the point of view of the University, the result was better than it might have been; nevertheless, the exchange was an indication that the relationship between the government and the University was no longer cosy.

Within the institution, too, things were changing. As Low was moving into the vice-chancellor’s office, Hohnen was seriously ill in hospital, and it seemed certain that he would be forced to take an early and reluctant retirement. For many people he was ‘Mr ANU’. Having served the University for nearly 27 years, he not only knew how the institution worked, but in many respects he had made it work. Coombs, at a presentation ceremony held during a Council luncheon in March 1975, remarked: ‘Each job he has taken on he has so built up that he can always do it better than anyone else’.

The University was unprepared for his departure. For he and his colleagues had created structures and procedures around themselves. In the early 1970s efficient administration continued to depend, as it had done in the past, on personal knowledge, influence and networks. While the system had served the institution well, it could not last forever. So much information resided in a few grey or greying heads. David Hodgkin, who had succeeded to the title of Registrar of the University when Hohnen had become Secretary in 1968, had already retired. Bill Hamilton, the Bursar, succeeded him, but retired within four years owing to ill health.

The pressures for change were there already. Low himself, as a director of a research school, had felt left out of the budget-making process. As he saw it, the directors and deans were summoned to meetings in the Chancery to be told how much of the cake they were to receive. Waiting their turn to be ushered into the vice-chancellor’s office, the academic heads of the University were becoming restless: but so long as the cake was large and generously iced, it would have seemed churlish to complain.

Low changed all this by establishing a Vice-Chancellor’s Advisory Group, comprising representatives of the directors and deans, who now had a genuine say in how the money was allocated. Rather than creating another ‘administrative supremo’, he transferred power away from specific individuals and into the hands of office-holders and committees. He also deprived the administrators of some of their influence and gave the academics a larger role in running the University.

Hohnen’s retirement also symbolised the loss of corporate memory that comes to any institution when the first generation of its makers departs. Like Coombs, he was a direct link with the past. More than anyone else, he carried forward Copland’s sense of participating in a ‘great intellectual adventure’. He had a clear vision of what the University was or ought to be about, and he imparted that vision to all who worked with him. A few of his close colleagues, including the Assistant Registrars Molly Bouquet and Patricia White and the Academic Registrar, George Dicker, remained custodians of the memory into the 1980s (and in White’s case, the early 1990s). But most of their colleagues had either forgotten the past or assumed that it was no longer relevant.
The most apt symbol of change was the disappearance with Hohnen’s retirement of what many people referred to as his ‘capacious pouch’. With Hohnen in the Chancery, there always seemed to be money available to get things done, not just a few hundred dollars to provide for an expensive overseas visitor, but tens of thousands of dollars to buy a costly item of equipment or extend a building. The source of the funds often seemed a mystery. (In fact, he managed to juggle savings accrued from one year to the next.) But while his colleagues might have wondered where the money came from, one thing was certain: when Hohnen left, his capacious pouch simply could not be found.

“A tighter ship”

The new era was one of uncertainty, especially about money. The signs that times would get tougher were there during Whitlam’s administration. Crawford, while still Vice-Chancellor, had proposed (rather cheekily) to the AUC that the growth of the Institute should be linked to the gross national product. The Chairman of the AUC, Peter Karmel, responded during a visit to the University that the rate of growth should be geared to the national economic situation, which implied slower growth than the University proposed.

Then, in 1975, the government’s turbulent last year, the three education commissions presented demands for funding which together far exceeded the nation’s capacity to pay. This led to, among other things, an immediate suspension of triennial funding for higher education and the introduction of financial guidelines for the education commissions. ‘Guidelines’ was nicely euphemistic: if it did not mean so already, it certainly came to mean ‘controls’. As Coombs put it during his valedictory address as Chancellor in 1976, ‘we may be moving towards a period when the terms of our dependence with honour will need to be negotiated’.

That year the Fraser government reintroduced triennial funding, but on a rolling basis, so that the universities were at least guaranteed minimal funding for the coming three years. It also promised to maintain a modest level of growth of 2 per cent a year in real terms. But government grants failed to keep pace with rising costs, so that by 1977, when there was a prospect of a 4 per cent decline in funding for the coming year, Council was complaining that the government had abrogated its previous assurances. The Minister’s response left little room for further protest: economic recovery must have overall priority. This undermined the University’s capacity for forward planning and led many members of staff to conclude that the government could not be trusted.

In various ways the University became enveloped in financial crisis. Some problems emerged gradually, such as ‘incremental creep’, the increasing cost of paying staff whose salary rates were increasing as they became older and more senior. Others came suddenly, such as the realisation that the University would have to increase greatly its contributions to staff superannuation funds in order to comply
with Commonwealth legislation and ensure that staff in different schemes received equal benefits. As salaries made up 80 per cent or more of the overall budget, every percentage point increase in salary-related costs forced cuts to staff numbers or to non-salary expenditure. Then there was the fuel crisis, beginning in 1973 but extending throughout the decade, so that, even with expensive conversions from oil heating to electricity, especially relevant to the ANU because of Canberra’s cold winters, the University’s fuel bill more than doubled from 1978 to 1979. Finally, the ANU, in common with other universities, was unprepared for the levelling out in student numbers and the resulting loss of anticipated extra income.

All this had harsh effects on teaching and research. First tutorialships, then chairs, were left unfilled, equipment purchases postponed, budgets for field trips curtailed and library orders cancelled. Both the faculties and the research schools were forced to trim their sails. Frank Gibson, Director of the John Curtin School, warned that while his school had advertised for two extra chairs, he doubted that it could fund them, and that in any case the school would have trouble attracting good people owing to its deteriorating conditions for research. Gibson expressed the view held widely around the campus that the ‘ANU’s reputation as a centre of excellence was under threat’.

At first Low’s public comments about the financial situation were restrained. In 1980, however, he decided that the time had come, as he put it, to press the alarm button. Without an injection of funds for the coming triennium, the work of the University, especially in the area of fundamental research, would be seriously jeopardised. Although the ANU had ‘patently tightened ship’, its budget, which had declined in real terms by 10 to 12 per cent from 1975 to 1981, was becoming too small to run a university of its range and size.

Low responded to the crisis by urging the government to increase its funds and his colleagues to reduce their spending. What was needed, he said, was ‘a tighter, trimmer ship, fore and aft, port and starboard, up in the mizzen, down in the hold’. But the University, having evolved during years of relatively generous government grants, was ill equipped to cope with hard times. This especially applied to the Institute. Where in the faculties student numbers provided the natural basis for distributing funds, the research schools’ budgets were determined on historical lines. Historical budgeting worked so long as there was growth. But in a period of contraction, the main object of each school was to maintain its slice of the cake relative to the others. The Vice-Chancellor, without access to any budgetary surplus, had no room to manoeuvre.

Yet a research institution had to be able to accommodate new endeavours. In concert with Ian Ross, now Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Low devised a scheme by which each school would be taxed by 1 per cent of its budget to provide a sum which would be assigned competitively to new projects. Although the percentage was modest, some directors were outraged by what they saw as an invasion of their traditional rights. Nevertheless, the scheme went ahead in 1980 and led to several valuable initiatives, including a research group in RSES in environmental geochemistry, a study in RSBS of the development and function of the cerebral cortex, and a centre in RSSS for economic policy research.
Besides having to handle contraction, Low and his senior advisers had to guard the University’s integrity. Dangers lurked within the public service. As well as cutting funds, the Treasury tried to impose restrictions on how they were spent, suggesting that the University’s budget should be subject to line by line approval. Low enlisted the help of Crawford and appealed to Alan Carmody, the head of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and a former member of the Department of Trade and Industry, where he had been, as Low later put it, ‘one of Crawford’s young men’. The two of them prevailed, Treasury was overruled, and at least for the time being the University could distribute its depleted resources as it thought best.

Low was adamant, as others had been, that the University should not be treated as a government department. The problem was that being a government department had its benefits. Until the early 1970s, the University had taken it for granted that the government would meet unexpected contingencies and make up major budgeting shortfalls. Now it was on its own. This was illustrated by the Whitlam government’s response when Cyclone Tracy, which devastated Darwin in late 1974, wrecked the buildings of the North Australia Research Unit, scattering books and papers far and wide. The ANU, by direction of the Treasury, was not insured, relying instead on the Commonwealth coffers to cover any such disaster. But now the government said no, and the University was left to finance its own rebuilding.

‘So bit by bit...’, recalled Ross (who seemed to have picked up Low’s partiality to a nautical metaphor), ‘the government cut the painter’.

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**The University community**

Low began his first report to the University by talking about the ‘10,000 of us’, the 6,000 students and 4,000 staff who made up the ANU community. All 10,000, he said, were a part of the University, whether they were ‘busily engaged in laboratories, ... going to the library to find a book or an article, ... paying bills, typing letters, checking inventories, or seeing that the buildings, the electric power, the university grounds, are properly provided for’. Low tried to visit as many departments and sections as he could, knowing how important it was that everyone should share a commitment to the institution and, so far as possible, a common understanding of its functions and purposes.

The concept of universities as communities of scholars was as old as universities themselves. As they had grown, the communities had been extended to include supporting non-academic staff who, in recent times, usually outnumbered the
academics. Thus the fabric of Oxbridge colleges included porters and scouts as well as masters and wardens. Notwithstanding their distance apart in a well-defined hierarchy, all were expected to give the college their allegiance.

The ANU had inherited this tradition of community. It had also inherited, though not in the rarefied forms evident at Oxford or Cambridge, some of the traditional divisions within a university, especially between the academic and non-academic staff. While Hohnen might define ‘academic’ to include administrators who had a highly developed perception of ‘what the University is all about’, most ANU people acknowledged a gulf that was sometimes difficult to bridge, narrow in the early years, but steadily widening as the institution grew in size. Also, within the categories ‘academic’ and ‘non-academic’, there were hierarchies, defined by titles, salaries and spatial arrangements, so that in some buildings the status of a member of staff could be measured by the number of square feet or metres he or she occupied. This did not always apply: Noel Butlin, perversely egalitarian, insisted as a professor of Economic History on a small room, just large enough to accommodate (in chaotic fashion) the shelves and piles of books and documents he happened to be using at the time.

Vertical and horizontal divisions notwithstanding, the sense of community remained strong, at least until the 1970s. Various formal and informal structures helped bind the community together. In the early years, Hohnen and his wife Phyllis took the lead in ensuring that not only the staff but also their spouses and children were integrated into the larger University ‘family’. A Women’s Club, founded in 1961 by Huxley’s wife, Molly, provided practical help for new arrivals and initiated a range of social activities for female spouses and staff, including bridge, tennis, French conversation, discussion groups on poetry and politics and, as fashions changed, birdwatching, bushwalking and spinning. Many staff and their spouses founded or joined clubs and societies devoted to music, film, poetry, drama and or some other cultural activity.

Sport likewise bridged the gaps between staff and students, academics and administrators, and one faculty, school or department and another. Cricket was as much a social as a sporting activity. The ANU Cricket Club, established in 1952 with Butlin as first President, organised some memorable matches, such as Men v. Women and Academics v. Administration, in which the players wore colourful outfits better suited to gardening or sunbathing than batting or fielding. In one of the earliest games between academic and administrative staff, the academics batted 26 and fielded 17 while the administrators batted 16 and fielded 13’ (Copland having left early). The academics won. Staff v. Student matches were played annually from the mid-1960s, and usually won by the students, a notable exception being the 1971 match when Deane Terrell, a Lecturer in Econometrics, carried the staff to glorious victory. He later became Vice-Chancellor.
Annual Town v. Gown matches, introduced in 1989, became great social and political events, capriciously favoured by the weather.

Certain sports joined specific parts of the University in friendly rivalry: the Central Administration v. The Faculties golf tournaments; the Bent End Inter-School Darts Championship, a competition between JCSMR, RSC and RSBS; the Furpel Shin Inter-Departmental Soccer Competition. In the 1990s the Meninga Club, named after a Canberra-based football hero, gave administrators and academics who might otherwise have had little in common the chance to share their enthusiasm for Rugby League.

Staff associations (a more apt term than trades unions) were a part of the University from the earliest years. In 1953 four social scientists, Nick Borrie, Noel Butlin, Bob Gollan and Trevor Swan, initiated moves to form the ANU Staff Association, which was open to academics and other graduate members of staff. Its purpose was to provide a formal mechanism for discussing salaries and conditions of service with the administration, and to play a social role in bringing staff together. In relation to salaries and conditions, Association members for a long time had little to complain about. Under the ANU Act, Council had ‘entire control and management’ of the University, which included relations with its staff. Hohnen argued that the National University should take the lead in such matters, and circumvented any immediate problems by dipping into his pouch. Such negotiations as were necessary on specific issues were usually conducted by the Association executive at regular lunches with the vice-chancellor and other senior officers at University House. For many years there was rarely a cross word.

By the mid-1970s, however, conditions for academics were becoming tougher. As the University lost the capacity to buy itself out of trouble, the Association defended members' interests with increasing vigour, while nevertheless insisting that it had no wish to set up an adversarial relationship between employer and employee. At the same time, industrial relations within the University were becoming subject to control by outside bodies. The creation in 1974 of an Academic Salaries Tribunal, responsible for determining salaries across the system, removed one wide area of dispute, but
others remained. Superannuation became a major source of controversy, with the Association seeking to win equal benefits for all its members, who had been appointed when different schemes were in operation, and the University having to watch every dollar. Then, as tenured jobs became harder to get throughout the tertiary system, the Association concerned itself with the conditions of untenured staff.

Dwindling opportunities for aspiring academics outside or on the edge of the system put increasing pressure on staff who already enjoyed job security, especially on those who were perceived as failing to carry their weight. A series of reviews of the research schools in the late 1970s and early 1980s identified, in confidence, a small number of senior academics who needed to be shown the spurs or put out to pasture. On individual cases, senior members of the Association executive worked closely with the Vice-Chancellor and the relevant Director to find a solution which balanced the interests of the staff member with that of the University at large. Solutions were rarely easy, partly because the University was unfamiliar with dealing with problems of this nature and partly because the problems were often intractable. When Low, acting on the advice of a confidential report on RSSS, initiated in 1980 moves to compulsorily retire Arthur Burns, Professor of International Relations, who had ceased to be a productive member of the school, he began a protracted dispute which extended over fourteen years. Burns, although forced on medical grounds to retire, sued the University. The case was eventually settled out of court.

The University environment was becoming more litigious, mirroring the rest of Australian society. John Molony, Professor of History in The Faculties and President of the Staff Association for six years, predicted when he stepped down in 1981 that, as the ANU had ceased to be master of its own affairs, the role of the Association was set to change, from a body which sought to avoid confrontation and litigation to a more militant organisation akin to a trade union. In the years that followed, industrial relations between the administration and academic staff continued to move gradually away from the gentlemanly dealings characteristic of a collegiate environment towards hard-headed negotiations whose norms were set by the wider community.

Yet the transition was not, and probably would never be complete. While the Association attracted between one-third and one-half of full-time eligible staff (the proportions varying greatly from one part of the University to the next), the executive could never claim to speak for all its members on a particular issue. That was in the nature of a university. Most academics were pleased to have a union to represent their interests, but only so long as it did not deny them the right to express their own opinions on industrial and other matters.

As the academics had laid claim to the title 'Staff Association', the general staff were represented by the ANU General Staff Association. Founded in 1954, the

Academics, administrators and footballers gather at University House in 1993 to celebrate the success of the Canberra Raiders. Left to right: Ricky Stuart (Canberra Raiders), Mal Meninga (Raiders Captain), Sue Cameron (Department of Commerce, Faculty of Economics and Commerce), Russell Craig (Professor of Commerce), Amanda Hart (Secretary's Office), Paul Osborne (Raiders), Geoffrey Caldwell (Director, Continuing Education) and Peter Green (Business Manager, Central Areas).
ANUGSA was intended to protect its members and to advance the interests of the University generally. Although the Association never registered as a union, it negotiated with the administration over salaries and conditions, and worked hard to improve community facilities for non-academic staff. From the late 1960s it yielded some of its industrial relations functions to a number of unions, including the Health and Research Employees Association, which sought to bring the University within the ambit of the conciliation and arbitration system. Senior staff in the Chancery thought this was a mistake: the general staff would do better to discuss their difficulties 'as colleagues in the University community' than as claimants conducting their disputes in front of an arbitrator. Nevertheless, the trend was towards unionisation. In 1972 the ANU Administrative and Allied Officers Association (AAOA), representing middle managers and some professional staff, became the first association in Australia made up entirely of university staff to achieve federal registration as a union.

So long as there was little to argue about, the unions functioned harmoniously alongside the traditional collegiate patterns of government. But as finances became tighter and outside pressures more insistent, relations became strained. In 1977 they reached breaking point during a sharp conflict with the AAOA. Under the pugnacious leadership of Peter Grimshaw, an ex-boxer, old Papua New Guinea hand and from 1964 Business Manager in RSSS and RSPaC, AAOA members argued that their salaries lagged behind those of administrators in comparable positions in government, and fought hard to increase their salaries while retaining existing superior conditions. The University appointed an external consultant, who recommended a new salary scale. Then, when the government introduced wage fixation guidelines intended to put an end to 'sweetheart' deals between employer and employee, the ANU was obliged to set the consultant's recommendations aside. The union reacted angrily. Several years passed before the issue was resoved.

The troubles between the University and the AAOA suggested a new era in industrial relations. So did the appointment as Industrial Officer in 1980 of a former industrial relations executive with a large mining company, and the registration about the same time of the ANU Academic Staff Association, as an 'organisation of employees', comparable, as the Personnel Officer David Gill put it, with the Waterside Workers' Federation and the Painters and Dockers Union. Gill was untroubled by the trend: 'What we have witnessed at ANU', he remarked, 'is no more than a slightly accelerated catching up with the realities of modern life'.

A series of events in 1982 suggested that the University had caught up entirely. As part of a campaign for the introduction of a 38-hour week for building and metals trades unionists, the ACT Trades and Labour Council demanded that members of its affiliated unions on campus be given one leisure day in twenty. The University, with a reduced budget and a new determination to resist future wage claims, said no, whereupon the unions called members out on strike and set up pickets at the entrances to the campus.

This was the ANU's first direct experience of strike action. Many staff found it distasteful. As pickets extended into a second week, some complained that the strikers
were interfering with mail deliveries, the supply of chemicals, or provisions for laboratory animals. Others argued that the University was confrontational in its approach to the unions. Most simply wanted to get on with their business. The University's Industrial Officer was burnt in effigy outside the Chancelry. Eventually, after two and a half weeks of pickets, the University yielded the 38-hour week to members of the building unions and the strikers went back to work.

At the next Council meeting, over one hundred members of three of the major general staff unions mounted a protest against the University's industrial relations policy by holding a silent vigil outside the Chancelry. Perhaps they were right to protest: the University was making heavy weather of its relations with the unions. On the other hand, the problems were large and unfamiliar. Having once had almost complete charge of negotiations with its staff, the University now faced the prospect of being entirely subservient to outside forces, the unions on the one hand, and government regulations and the arbitration tribunals on the other. Uncertain of their own role, the University's negotiators moved shakily from one crisis to another. To complicate matters, University employees were members of over twenty unions, each with its own agenda.

There was also the unresolved question about the role of unions in a collegiate system of governance. Unions, in a traditional industrial relations environment, existed to serve the interests of their members, who were expected to show loyalty to the unions in return; yet a traditional collegiate university demanded the allegiance of the university community. Were collegiality and industrial processes in conflict with one another?

Following the turbulence of the early 1980s, relations between the administration and the unions were more harmonious, as they were in the nation at large. The administration grew more adept at handling industrial issues, while the unions became less belligerent in pursuing their claims. There were also fewer unions for the administration to deal with: several amalgamations culminated in the formation in the 1990s of the National Tertiary Education Union, which embraced both academic and general staff; though whether it would help sustain the notion of the University as a single community remained to be seen.
### Mixed reviews

After Titterton had been prised out of the headship of the Research School of Physical Sciences, an acting director occupied the position for a year while an electoral committee searched the world for a suitable successor. They found one in Robert Street, who had been appointed in 1960 foundation Professor and Chairman of the Department of Physics at Monash University. There he had put together an outstanding team of physicists, specialising in solid state and low temperature physics, and had built up a strong graduate school which had produced over seventy PhDs in a dozen or so years. He was also prominent on national committees relating to science, technology and education, especially the Australian Research Grants Committee, of which he had been Chairman since 1972.

Arriving in Canberra in 1974, Street was the first ‘outsider’ to head the Physical Sciences school. His appointment suggests one of the many ways in which the ANU benefited from the revolution in higher education following the Murray Report: the new universities and the expanded old ones provided a source of talent within Australia that had not been available in the late 1940s.

A gently-spoken and wickedly-humoured Yorkshireman, Street understood universities well. But he soon found that RSPhysS presented problems to challenge the most profound understanding. His first report to Council identified a malaise: ‘For a variety of historical reasons the School had developed as a collection of independent, generally non-interacting departments, regarding themselves as largely autonomous’. The departments, he explained, had widely different philosophical bases, ranging from Engineering Physics, which had as its main objective the use of the homopolar generator, to theoretically oriented departments in which the activities of individuals were of prime concern. Student numbers were declining and the staff were getting older. There was a need for new blood and new ideas: but ‘the great inertia of existing institutions’ was likely to stand in the way.

To get things moving, Street persuaded the faculty board to advertise several senior appointments in any area of the school’s activities. This in itself was quite a coup, breaking down traditional departmental allegiances. Then he managed to win the board’s support for asking the electoral committee, which was made up partly of senior scientists from outside the University, to help in the assessment and evaluation of the school’s activities: in other words, to review its work. This was a revolution, not merely for the ANU but for the higher education system generally. There had been reviews before, including an assessment of RSSS by a distinguished visitor in 1959 in 1959; and since 1973 there had been internal reviews in The Faculties each time a head of department had retired or resigned: but none had been as intensive and wide-ranging as the one Street now set in train. And so far, no university or part of a university had submitted itself to a full-scale review with a significant number of external reviewers.

Some outside members of the electoral committee had serious misgivings about what Street was asking them to do. ‘The idea of a Faculty enquiring into the “intrinsic value of lines of research” and the “relative importance of various programmes in the context of'}
international research effort" fills me with dismay", wrote the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of
the University of Adelaide. And the Vice-Chancellor at Newcastle wondered 'if members
of the Faculty Board would be pleased to have outsiders stomping around and making
gratuitous comments about their work. If so, they are very enlightened ...
'
No sooner had the committee begun its review than the University experienced sharp
cuts to its funding. So instead of choosing new areas for development, the committee
could do no more than recommend the best use of existing resources. With the help of
56 outside assessors, many unsparing in their criticisms, it worked through each of the
ten departments and units, weighing the quality of specific research programs and
looking at the work of individual staff. Its conclusions varied markedly from one
department or unit to the next, ranging from high praise for Applied Mathematics,
which had 'an excellent record of achievement', tackled worthwhile problems and
functioned as a team; to pointed criticism of Engineering Physics, which cost too much,
spread its resources too thinly, and produced too little. According to the committee,
some sections of the school appeared to have no clear idea of how their long-term
objectives related to fundamental scientific questions; there was a preoccupation with
the development of equipment and facilities for their own sake; and there was little
enthusiasm for new and exciting areas of physics and mathematics.

The committee recommended remedies. Some activities should be terminated and
others encouraged. Rigid departmental structures should be broken down and
replaced by groups pursuing specific research activities. Resources should be
allocated on the basis of academic merit and fulfilment of the school's role as a
national centre of research excellence. Together the recommendations gave the
Director the licence he wanted for wholesale reform.

But Street made two serious errors. First, rather than ensuring that the committee
derive its powers of review from outside the school, he sought the approval of the
faculty board for the evaluation process. What the board had given it could just as
easily take away: as the official initiator of the review, it could control the outcome.

Second, he chaired the committee. This meant that staff members who did not like
what the report had to say saw him as one of 'them' rather than one of 'us'. Many also
assumed that he was the author of the report. This was untrue: in fact, the external
members set the tone of the comments. Nevertheless, as chairman he was invariably
associated with the committee's report; and if the report should fail, his own status
and ambitions for the school would surely be compromised.

When the report reached the faculty board, reactions ranged from delight to
outrage. Those who believed that the school was due for a shake-up looked forward to
immediate action; others refused to accept the report as an accurate portrayal of the
their activities and scientific worth, suggesting that Street himself was ill informed
about the work of some departments. Titterton, still a professor in Nuclear Physics,
told one of his overseas colleagues that the committee had been made up of
'inappropriate personnel' including competitors within the University for funds, 'a
declared enemy of the School through his activities in fighting for Earth Sciences', a
theoretical chemist, and two scientists who were not even members of the Academy!
‘So I suppose one should not be too surprised that the report is as bad as it is.’

Street, said his colleague Barry Ninham, Professor of Applied Mathematics and one of the school’s Young Turks, numbered among his attributes ‘patience, decency, loyalty and a firm belief in the ultimate reasonableness of men’. These were feeble weapons against inertia, especially when buttressed by tradition. Confronted by the prospect of radical change, the faculty board went through the motions of approving new guidelines for the allocation of resources but stalled when the time came to implement them. Ninham, fearing that the review would come to nothing, appealed to Low to intervene: ‘I plead, urge and beg you to exhibit your firmness quickly. Something must be seen to be done.’ But what could be done? The professors and other senior staff who made up the faculty board were tenured and therefore almost invulnerable; and they were used to having their own way. Low, at Street’s request, had already approved some additional appointments to bring in new blood. Beyond that, Street had little room to manœuvre. But the ferment injected by his review was working and the school would never be the same again.

Early in 1978 Street left the ANU to become Vice-Chancellor at the University of Western Australia. After another interregnum, he was replaced by John Carver, who found it easier in harder times to bring about many of the changes that the review had foreshadowed.

If the immediate impact of Street’s review was limited, its effects on the whole system of higher education were profound, in ways that Street himself could scarcely have imagined. As the review was taking place, Low recognised that the process offered opportunities for bringing about change in the new era, and decided to introduce a system of reviews for the whole Institute of Advanced Studies. ‘As I see it’, he told the University in his 1976 report, ‘the essential purpose of any review is to help a School, a Department, or whatever, however good it may be already, to be better yet’. The fact that the older schools were now over 25 years old was sufficient reason, he said, to have a close look at them. He anticipated that reviews would in due course become ‘part of our academic culture’.

So, one by one, all the research schools were reviewed, Social Sciences, Pacific Studies and the John Curtin School in 1978, Biological Sciences in 1979, Chemistry in 1982 and Earth Sciences in 1983. In the RSPhysS review, members of the University had been in the majority. The new reviews were each conducted by a panel of four or five members, not more than one of whom was a member of the University. The system was promptly extended to faculties, centres and units throughout the University, which were subjected to scrutiny by a panel which included at least one outsider.

Among the research schools, John Curtin came first and set a pattern. The committee of four, two from Britain, one from France and one from the United States, chaired by the Director of the National Institute of Medical Research in London, Sir Arnold Burgen, spent thirteen working days in Canberra, during which they talked with the Vice-Chancellor, the Director of the school and other senior members of the University, visited every department and unit, absorbed reports from numerous referees, and wrote a ten-page report, along with a confidential annex on specific departments and individuals. Later reports were sometimes longer: the Earth
Sciences report was over fifty pages. But generally they reflected a similar degree of intensive effort by a small team of academics eminent in their disciplines.

While the committees' conclusions and recommendations inevitably differed from one to the next, the similarities were also striking. Each commented on the achievements of the relevant school to date, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The panel for Earth Sciences declared unequivocally that the school was 'an international leader in its field' and that some of its members had made contributions of worldwide influence. The John Curtin committee concluded that the school had greatly enhanced the development of medical sciences in Australia and given the country an enviable reputation in its field, while the Pacific Studies reviewers acknowledged the great measure of success the school had achieved, especially in relation to Papua New Guinea and the Pacific islands. The Biological Sciences and Chemistry reviewers were complimentary, but more reserved, while the Social Sciences panel found it easier to praise certain individuals and parts than to offer encomiums on the whole. On balance, the reviewers concluded that the schools were good, sometimes very good, but no better than they ought to have been in a well-funded environment devoted wholly to research.

Looking for means of improvement, the committees tended to focus on problems relating to their objectives, leadership and structure. The Social Scientists were reminded that the appropriate role of the school could hardly be the same as it was 30 years ago, when there was little postgraduate work in the social sciences in other Australian universities and The Faculties did not exist. There should now be less emphasis on training, more stimulation of research effort throughout Australia, fewer tenured appointments, and more collaborative research, especially on Australian topics. Similarly, the Chemists were told that they needed to sharpen their research objectives, while members of RSPacS were urged to identify priorities within a more precise definition of 'the Pacific'.

Leadership was seen to be a problem in the Research School of Chemistry. The panel challenged the system of changing deans every three years, which was a tenet of the founders. Where Birch, Craig and Nyholm had seen movement at the top as a means of encouraging flexibility, the committee judged that the system inhibited change, since it gave control over resources to the faculty board, which distributed funds on 'an egalitarian rather than a scientific basis'. What was needed, said the committee, was a leader, appointed perhaps from outside the University, who would be there long enough to give the school a clearer sense of direction.

The John Curtin reviewers concluded that the heads of departments had too much power and the director too little. Perhaps recalling Florey's warning 30 years earlier about the dangers of departments developing into 'independent little kingdoms', the committee referred to a 'regal interpretation of the prerogatives of professors'. Departmental barriers were high, and departmental integrity, space, equipment and staffing were jealously defended. There was little concern for research priorities. To prove its point, the committee cited the Department of Medical Chemistry, which had been slowly declining in the previous decade. Medical Chemistry under Adrien Albert had never been exactly at home in the school; and when the Research School of Chemistry and the Department of Chemistry in SGS developed, his department became
largely redundant. In 1968, with the retirement of Albert and several other senior staff members forthcoming, the school decided to wind the department down. But the situation was ‘allowed to fester’, and a decade later Medical Chemistry still consumed what the committee called ‘an entirely inappropriate proportion’ of school resources.

So the reviewers proposed radical changes, including the total abolition of the departmental structure and its replacement by flexible groups, similar to those in RSC. They also concluded that the office of director was central to the well-being of the school and that its authority should be strengthened. There should be provision for the director to be creative and to realise ‘some of his dreams of a finer institution’.

The Biological Sciences reviewers likewise focused on problems of structure; and while they did not go so far as to recommend that the school revert to its original structure based on groups, they did urge departmental heads to try to identify with the school’s ‘larger objectives’. The Social Sciences reviewers remarked that their school had calcified into departments, and that ‘once a departmental structure is established it is remarkably resistant to change of any sort’. Their answer was to abolish departments, set up three divisions under associate directors, and introduce flexible groups.

The review process was not necessarily a pleasant one, with reactions varying from willing acceptance of some of the comments to outright opposition. Some recommendations were promptly implemented, others, such as the proposed restructuring of RSSS, vigorously resisted or quietly ignored. The impact of the report on RSBS was diminished by what the school’s Director, Bernard John, called its ‘highly emotive language’; and the inclusion in several reports of confidential sections relating to specific departments and staff opened sores that rankled in some cases, such as that of Arthur Burns, for many years to come.

Whatever their effects in specific areas, the reviews forced members of the University to look hard at the overall objectives of the research schools, individually and collectively; to consider large issues, such as the relationship between academic structures and research creativity and productivity; and above all, to see themselves as part of a wider higher education system in which the place of the Institute was not absolutely certain. What was certain was that the review process, having once been set in motion, was irreversible. Low had warned: ‘we have to be careful that we do not overdo all of this’. But who was to say when enough was enough?

Because the Institute was unique, reviews of the research schools almost inevitably opened up basic questions about their nature and purpose. By contrast, reviews of the faculties, and of specific departments within them, whose teaching and research objectives were clearly understood, ought to have been straightforward. They usually were. Occasionally, however, a review panel pointed a faculty or department in a new direction, and made other suggestions which significantly changed the shape of the University. For example, the 1982 report of the Faculty of Economics review committee recommended the creation of a new degree, the Bachelor of Commerce, to
provide more suitable courses for students who wished to pursue a career in accounting and who were deterred by the extremely demanding and heavily theoretical courses then on offer.

Asian Studies was the one faculty in the University unique in Australia, and like the research schools it posed some unique and testing problems for reviewers. The faculty was the direct descendant of the School of Oriental Languages, which had been established in Canberra University College in 1952 to provide language training for diplomats and other federal public servants. The first language courses were in modern and classical Chinese, followed by modern and classical Japanese, and Bahasa Indonesia and Malay. There were also courses which introduced students to the ‘history and civilization’ of Asian countries. Hans Bielenstein, the first professor of Oriental Languages, wanted the school to be seen as providing more than mere language teaching, and at his request its name was changed to Oriental Studies. Following amalgamation, it was given the status of a faculty. Bielenstein left for Columbia University in 1961 and was succeeded (as Professor of Chinese) by another distinguished Swede, N.G.D. Malmgqvist, who became the faculty’s first Dean. While these early professors gave Oriental Studies strong beginnings, they also tended to make the faculty perceive Asia through European rather than Australian eyes.

Over the next two decades the faculty won a reputation for profound scholarship in various areas. At one time or another, several eminent people occupied chairs: Liu Ts’un-yen in the Department of Chinese, J.W. de Jong in South Asian and Buddhist Studies, and A.L. Basham, a guru of South Asian history who personified the otherwise intangible notion of Oriental Civilizations. The University Library, in stubborn competition with the National Library of Australia, built up one of the finest Asian collections in the world. In 1971 the faculty hosted and Basham presided over the world’s foremost conference of researchers on Asia, the International Congress of Orientalists, which was attended by some 1200 people and, despite the contretemps mentioned in chapter 10 about whether or not academics should speak out on political issues, won for the faculty worldwide acclaim.

In teaching too, the faculty was a marked success, attracting large numbers of students. In 1968, a boom year, total enrolments nearly doubled, creating a need for repeat lectures in Asian Civilizations. Enrolments in Indonesian outnumbered those in French, which had traditionally been the most popular foreign language course. Then in 1972 new enrolments increased by over 30 per cent, especially in Chinese, which the Dean, Liu Ts’un-yen, attributed in part to President Nixon’s ‘ping-pong’ diplomacy with the People’s Republic of China. The faculty also extended its language course offerings to include Hindi and Thai, and the AUC accorded the University special status, with additional funding, for teaching ‘languages in lesser demand’.

In 1970 the name of the faculty was changed to Asian Studies. At the Board of the School of General Studies, Basham explained on behalf of the faculty that the term ‘Oriental Studies’ was now inappropriate, because ‘Oriental’, as well as being geographically vague, literally meant ‘eastern’, which Asia in relation to Australia certainly was not. Also, the term had ‘an exotic flavour of mystery and chinoiserie’. Yet
Basham himself was associated with that mysterious view of Asia, or at least part of it, having published in 1954 (well before coming to Canberra) *The Wonder that was India*, an encyclopedic survey of the subcontinent before the coming of the Muslims in the sixteenth century, which ranged in subject matter across languages, literature, religions, government and the arts. Courses in the Department of Asian Civilizations, as it had now become, continued to reflect grand visions of Asian history, institutions and thought, but rarely ventured into the present. So while students studied languages both classical and modern, their non-language courses offered little sense of relevance to Australia’s growing involvement with Asia, and still less to their possible future careers.

In the meantime several other universities, including Sydney, Melbourne and Monash, had developed Asian studies courses (often staffed by ANU graduates) which offered strong competition to Asian Studies at the ANU. While the faculty continued to house a wider range of studies relating to Asian languages and cultures than anywhere else in Australia, it was not, as the Dean, A.H. Johns conceded in 1976, a national beacon attracting the best students from throughout the country. About this time, enrolments in Asian studies were declining everywhere. Bound by tradition and starved of resources to embark on new initiatives, members of the faculty looked to the future with a sense of impending crisis.

In this context, Low appointed a review committee, chaired by himself and comprising a dozen other members from inside and outside the faculty, including the Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. As the committee recognised, the faculty had to confront the key question: ‘How should Asia be studied?’. Implicit in this was a conflict, faced by every institution which sought to teach or organise knowledge along regional lines, between regional approaches and traditional disciplinary structures. There were also what the committee called ‘perennial controversies’, including the place of language training and the relative emphasis given to classical and modern studies.

The reviewers remarked that the faculty was not well situated to address these issues, and suggested changes to make it so, especially doing away with departments, which they saw as barriers to flexibility and creative thinking. They also did some creative thinking of their own. After deciding that the faculty should be retained as a separate entity, on the grounds that no other Australian university offered this distinct approach to Asian studies, they recommended a sharp change in direction. While the undergraduate teaching program should remain securely anchored in an Asian language, students should also be given a strong background in one of the disciplines relating to Asia, which would be offered by departments in other faculties. They would thus receive a more broadly based degree; and the faculty, now at the periphery of teaching in the humanities, would be brought into the mainstream, with programs to
which the University as a whole would contribute. Within the faculty, departments should be abolished and replaced by centres based on area studies. By these means, Asian Studies would achieve 'a new kind of stature' within the University.

Many of the committee's suggestions were implemented in the early 1980s, and for a time the future seemed promising. But things began to go wrong. Although centres were introduced in 1983, against forthright opposition from some departments, before long the faculty was drifting again into separate compartments, mostly speaking (sometimes literally) their own languages, and unable to present a collective front to the rest of the University or the outside world. The committee failed to ensure that departments in other faculties were obliged to teach courses relating to Asia; and when representatives of the disciplines did teach such courses, they were often perceived as doing so from a western vantage point, without adequate consideration of historical and cultural contexts. Student numbers continued to decline; retiring staff were not replaced; and when from the mid-1980s enrolments began to rise, again in line with a national trend, the depleted staff were scarcely able to handle the load. In 1993, when another review committee applied itself to the faculty's problems, Asian Studies was once again facing an uncertain future.

Low's seven-year term as Vice-Chancellor ended in 1982. He would have liked to remain at least a little longer, but there was no precedent for extending a vice-chancellor's appointment beyond its original term; and in any case, many people in the University thought he had stayed long enough. Like every vice-chancellor before and after, he too had been reviewed on an almost daily basis by members of the University community; and the reviews he had received were noticeably mixed.

On the one hand, many praised his efforts to get out into the faculties, schools and departments, to bring people from diverse disciplines and sections together, to represent the University boldly in public forums, to vigorously defend the institution when it was under attack. On the other, many were critical of some of his appointments, offended by what somebody referred to as his 'episcopal style', and alarmed by his introduction of a 'new era' when they were quite happy with the old one, especially when the new era brought with it a potentially destructive system of reviews. Others were alarmed by the University's deteriorating relations with government and dismayed by his evident failure to halt the trend.

Low was 'a university man', a stout upholder of university traditions, with a tendency to see the university as self-contained. It was appropriate that his next appointment after leaving Canberra was as Smuts Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth and a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge, and that in due course he became President of Clare Hall, Cambridge. The problem was that university traditions, if not directly under attack, were becoming less relevant in Australia during the early 1980s. Also, Low's international perspective and networks were less valuable than they might have been in earlier decades, when the University
was seeking to make its mark in the academic world. Now it was more important to know how the system worked in nearby government departments and in Parliament House on the other side of the lake.

Low also had the misfortune to be in charge of the University at a time when its financial situation was getting rapidly worse. No doubt there had to be a tighter ship; yet Low believed, like Copland in more affluent times, that a vice-chancellor’s instinct should be to say ‘yes’ whenever an academic came to him with a good idea. (Other vice-chancellors have reflected that the art of being a successful vice-chancellor was knowing how to say ‘no’. ) So, as his term neared an end, Low could still be seen setting a course at the helm, encouraging the crew, or presiding at the captain’s table. Unfortunately, many of his crew feared that the ship was making little headway in a choppy sea.

Crawford for one had decided it was time for a change. As Low’s term neared an end he approached Peter Karmel, currently Chairman of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (successor to the three peak higher education bodies, including the AUC), a former Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University in Adelaide, and Australia’s best-known tertiary administrator, who knew better than anybody the ins and outs of government and higher education. Many hoped that under Karmel’s guidance the University would enter another new era.