

Introduction

The Making of The Australian National University was first published in 1996 on the fiftieth anniversary of the University's formal beginnings. Within a few years it was out of print. This new edition marks no particular occasion, but ensures that the book is freely available, if not for convenient reading from beginning to end, at least for easy reference.

Except for the addition of this introduction and the brief list of errata, the electronic edition is a facsimile of the original. I have not taken the opportunity to bring the story up to date. There is room for debate about when is the best time to update an institutional history. If written too early, a history risks losing perspective by becoming absorbed in the preoccupations of the present; if too late, it can lose access to oral sources. My own view in relation to the ANU is that ten years is too short and fifty too long: perhaps twenty-five years is about right. In the meantime it is essential that potential sources, written and oral, are well preserved and kept up to date.

This much is certain. When a new history of the ANU is written, or when the current history is updated, there will be much for the historian to say. Over the past decade the University has undergone a transformation more fundamental than any time since 1960, when the original, research-only institution was amalgamated with Canberra University College to create an institution dedicated to teaching as well as research. As this history shows, amalgamation created a University in two parts; and while successive vice-chancellors tried to bridge the two, especially through University centres and the Graduate School, tensions associated with the bifurcated structure remained. Under the current Vice-Chancellor, Ian Chubb, the University is being restructured around seven Colleges, which are intended to draw together and subsume many of the functions of the faculties and research schools. One of the tasks for a future historian will be to consider how well the new system has worked.

Appointed at the beginning of 2001, Chubb is already the University's longest serving vice-chancellor. During a period of change and uncertainty in Australian higher education, his contribution will surely be a significant theme in any future history. It is also a reminder that ever since 'Nugget' Coombs and a small group of colleagues articulated a vision for the University in the mid-1940s, individuals have had the capacity to influence its shape and purpose.

Other themes explored in this history remain significant, including the University's relationship with the federal government, the function of strategic planning, and changes in the academic workplace. Issues relating to academic freedom seem less compelling than they once had been, while few people now speak of 'the two cultures' of the arts and sciences. The two cultures in universities today are the managerial and collegial, with few academics having any doubts about which is likely to triumph. Another new theme for a future historian will be internationalisation, touched on briefly in this history. Now international students make up a high percentage of undergraduate as well as postgraduate

student numbers, while numerous Australian students spend part of their undergraduate years studying abroad.

Perhaps the most obvious theme to emerge since this history was written is vigorous competition within the Australian tertiary sector, ironically coinciding with more intrusive government regulation and demands for accountability. The University has taken the lead in forging a 'Group of Eight' alliance with other Australian research universities, as well as close links with a select number of outstanding universities in other parts of the world. The ANU has always been unique among Australian universities. One of the challenges now is to assert its continuing difference in an environment where every other university claims to be unique as well.

Notwithstanding the challenges of recent years, the University has maintained its ascendancy in research and teaching. Undergraduate satisfaction remains high, while international assessments consistently recognise the ANU as Australia's top research university. Soon after this history was first published, two former members of the John Curtin School of Medical Research were awarded the Nobel Prize for work they had conducted in the School during the early 1970s. Later researchers throughout the University have maintained a steady flow of grants and awards.

In the Preamble to the 1996 edition of this history, my co-author and I wrote: 'We hope, immodestly, this book will serve as a substitute for lost corporate memory and therefore be of use to the University's current and future makers as they reflect on the purposes of the institution and plan its future directions'. In 2009 it is good to know that the history has indeed been helpful, at different times and in diverse ways, as reviewers and planners have guided the University through challenging times. We trust it will continue to be so: for it is certain that there is little chance of effectively planning an institution's future directions without a clear understanding of its past.

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ERRATA

p.107 delete 'from Britain'. Before independence in 1962, Western Samoa was administered by New Zealand as a United Nations Trusteeship.

pp.214, 454 for 'Bryan Furness' read 'Bryan Furnass'.

p.295 for 'Arthur Burns, Professor of International Relations' read 'Arthur Burns, Professor of Political Science'.