

# Chapter 7. Director of the John Curtin School of Medical Research, 1967 to 1973

## My Appointment as Director

Hugh Ennor, who had been knighted in 1965, was Dean of the John Curtin School in 1966 (he preferred the title of Dean, rather than Director). He had been appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor in 1964 and hoped to be appointed Vice-Chancellor. However, Sir John Crawford was the obvious choice for that post and, in February 1967, Ennor accepted an invitation from Senator John Gorton to become the first Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Education and Science.

Professor Colin Courtice was appointed Acting Dean, and the position of Director of the John Curtin School was advertised in Australia and overseas. I had spent a large part of my time in 1966 and 1967 working on the book, *The Biology of Animal Viruses*, and felt out of touch with bench work, so I decided to apply for the position, and was appointed, with the title of Director, for a period of seven years. At the time I thought that I would want to spend some time at the bench and arranged that I should also have a chair and access to a laboratory in the Department of Microbiology. I also arranged for Colin Courtice to be my deputy, if I were to go abroad.

## Governance

An interesting comment on the governance of different Research Schools in the ANU was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* at the time of Ennor's farewell dinner:

If Senator Gorton was looking for a strong man to head his new Commonwealth Department of Education and Science, he has certainly found such a man in Sir Hugh Ennor. Sir Hugh is a big, hearty biochemist whose administrative talents have come into full flower at the Australian National University. Since 1953 Sir Hugh has been Dean of the John Curtin School of Medical Research, and since 1964 he has been Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Unlike the humanities schools at the Australian National University, the John Curtin School has no faculty structure. It is run entirely by the Dean. The School of Social Sciences, under Professor P. H. Partridge, is referred to jocularly as an Athenian democracy; the School of Pacific Studies, headed by Sir John Crawford until he recently became Vice-Chancellor, as a guided democracy and the John Curtin School of Medical Research as an Oriental despotism.

One of my first jobs on becoming Director was to introduce the Faculty/Faculty Board structure into the School. Fortunately, I had been a member of the Committee appointed by Vice-Chancellor Huxley and chaired by economist David Bensusan-Butt, as had Frank Gibson, Professor of Biochemistry and three senior non-professorial staff—Desmond Brown, from Medical Chemistry, Hugh Mackenzie, from Physical Biochemistry, and Bede Morris, from Experimental Pathology—along with Sir Robert Madgwick, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of New England and Geoffrey Sawyer, Professor of Law in the Research School of Social Sciences. In May 1967, the Butt Committee produced a report recommending that there should be a Faculty consisting of all academic staff of and above the rank of Research Fellow, and a Faculty Board, composed of Heads of Departments and four members of the non-professorial academic staff elected by Faculty, with the Director as Chairman. For my term of office, as recommended by the Butt Committee, I acted as Chairman of both Faculty Board and Faculty. After my resignation in May 1973, Faculty Board decided that the Chairman of Faculty should be elected by Faculty, and Ian Marshall, my first PhD student and by then Senior Fellow, was elected to that position.

## **Changes in Existing Departments and Units**

### **Department of Genetics**

Early in my term as Director, decisions had to be made on two departments and one unit, after their heads had retired or resigned. David Catcheside had been appointed Professor of Genetics in the John Curtin School in 1964, on the understanding that he would act as Adviser to the University on the development of biological research, as distinct from medical research, in the ANU. The Research School of Biological Sciences was established in October 1967, with Catcheside as Director, and he and most members of his staff were transferred to its payroll. However, they continued to occupy their existing laboratories in the John Curtin School until the building of the new School was completed early in 1973. Robert Kirk, a human geneticist who had taken up duty as a Senior Fellow in June 1967, elected to remain in the John Curtin School as the sole academic staff member of the Human Genetics Group, which was attached for administration to the Department of Clinical Science until the Department of Human Biology was established in 1970 (see below).

### **Department of Medical Chemistry**

My most difficult decision concerned the future of the Department of Medical Chemistry after Adrien Albert retired, at age 65, in December 1972. The Department occupied all four storeys of the rear west wing, a situation justified in the early days by the fact that it was the only department of chemistry in the University and there was a need for a two-storey section to accommodate production equipment. However, a Research School of Chemistry was established

in the Institute of Advanced Studies in 1964 and its building was completed in 1967. By the late 1960s, there was growing pressure for additional laboratory space in the John Curtin School, especially for the developing work in pharmacology, and proposals for the School's submission to the Australian Universities Commission for the 1972–74 triennium were urgently required. In 1969, after extensive discussion by Faculty and Faculty Board, including a subcommittee comprising the Director, Professor Geoffrey Badger (University of Adelaide), Professor R. D. Wright (University of Melbourne and long-time member of the ANU Council), Professors Frank Gibson and Alexander Ogston (Biochemistry and Physical Biochemistry in JCSMR), it was decided that when Albert retired, at the end of 1972, no replacement would be sought and the Department would be contracted to a Group. I fully expected that some members of this Group would transfer to the Research School of Chemistry, but that did not occur and the Group was not disbanded until 1985.

## Electron Microscope Unit

In July 1967, Edgar Mercer, Professorial Fellow and Head of the Electron Microscope Unit, decided to move to the United States and make his living as a sculptor. The Unit was reorganized and in 1971 absorbed into the Department of Experimental Pathology.

## Establishment of New Departments

My term as Director was a time of expansion in the ANU. In the JCSMR, this was represented by the establishment of four new Departments: Clinical Science, Human Biology, Immunology and Pharmacology.

### Department of Clinical Science

The Head of the Department of Clinical Science, Professor Malcolm Whyte, had been appointed in 1966. However, because of delays in the completion of new laboratories for the Department in the Canberra Community Hospital, he worked in the School building and in the field in Papua New Guinea before moving into the Hospital in September 1967. In the Canberra Community Hospital, besides providing a clinical service, by referral, for both ambulatory patients and in-patients, the Department conducted a program of clinical and laboratory research oriented towards problems associated with coronary heart disease. Initially there was a good deal of suspicion among doctors in the hospital that the presence of the Department of Clinical Science was the thin edge of the wedge, the introduction of government-paid medicos into a purely private practice hospital. Malcolm and his staff negotiated these problems effectively.

## Department of Human Biology

A Department of Human Biology was established in 1970 by bringing together Robert Kirk, a human geneticist who had elected to remain within the JCSMR when Catcheside transferred to the Research School of Biological Sciences, and the Urban Biology Group, headed by Stephen Boyden, which had previously been located in the Department of Microbiology (see Chapter 5). Research in the new department was carried out in these two fields, each concerned with human population biology. In 1972, the Urban Biology Group, in collaboration with the University of Hong Kong, initiated a study of the human ecology of Hong Kong, then the most densely populated city on earth. This was a groundbreaking study of the 'metabolism' of a city, which was completed in 1977 and which led to Boyden's involvement in UNESCO's Man in the Biosphere program.

Kirk's interest had long been in human genetics, and in Canberra he undertook population genetic studies of Australian Aborigines, natives of Papua New Guinea and, with local collaborators, inhabitants of India and South Africa. In 1973, he was appointed Head of the Department of Human Biology.

## Department of Immunology

In 1970, Council approved the establishment of a Department of Immunology, and Bede Morris, who had come to Canberra with Colin Courtice in 1958, was appointed Professor and moved from the Department of Experimental Pathology to the new department, with three other academic staff and four PhD students. Initially dispersed in several parts of the building, early in 1973 they came together in the space previously occupied by Catcheside and his staff. Their studies were focused on self/non-self discrimination, with a particular concentration on transplantation biology, using a unique and particularly useful system of pregnant sheep and their foetuses. This made it possible to cannulate the lymphatic system of both mother and foetus and study the development of circulating lymphoid cells in both animals.

## Department of Pharmacology

In 1966, David Curtis, Eccles' first PhD student, had been appointed a Professor within the Department of Physiology. In 1973, when space became available in the laboratories occupied by the former Department of Medical Chemistry, he was appointed Professor of Pharmacology, and with his staff moved into some of the vacated laboratories. Research in the new department was concentrated on *in vivo* studies of the effects of known chemicals administered close to single neurones in various portions of the nervous system of the cat and the relationship of the effects observed to synaptic inhibition or excitation.

## Developments in Older Departments

The principal developments in the established departments were the appointment in 1966 of Frank Gibson as Professor of Biochemistry, replacing Hugh Ennor; of Gordon Ada as Professor of Microbiology in 1968, replacing me; of Laurie Nichol in 1971, replacing Sandy Ogston; and of Peter Bishop in 1967, replacing Jack Eccles.

## Building Activities

For the first time since the occupation of the new building in 1957, substantial new building activities, other than the fitting out of vacant wings for Physical Biochemistry and Genetics, were carried out in 1967–73.

## Specific-Pathogen-Free Animal House

A special building for breeding specific-pathogen-free rats and mice, located to the west of the main Animal Breeding House, was commenced in 1971 and completed in 1972, but because of difficulties with the mechanical services it was not commissioned until early 1973.

## Wing F Animal House

In 1968, a Radioisotope Suite, with chemical laboratories and rooms for handling with safety large and small animals that had been inoculated with highly radioactive materials, was built on the eastern end of what had been the lawn-covered roof of Wing F, the Experimental Pathology/Immunology animal house. Also, on the ground floor of the same building, a well-equipped Animal Hospital was constructed, with operating theatres for large and small animals.

## The Library and the Space Beneath It

In 1957, the Library, on the top floor, occupied the area east of the passageway connecting the front and rear wings and there was a small open balcony extending towards the west. By 1970, the balcony had been converted to library space extending 6 metres to the west, and the Common Room, in the corresponding area on the ground floor, was also extended. The additional space on the floor level below this was used for storage space, a School Computer Centre and a seminar room.

## Accommodation for the Department of Human Biology

Just as laboratories had been constructed on the roof on Wing F in 1968, in 1972, laboratories to accommodate the Department of Human Biology were built on the lawn-covered roof of Wing E, the Animal House for Infected Animals. The layout of the laboratories was designed by Kirk with advice from Boyden. In addition to laboratories and studies, a Seminar Room and adjacent space which served as a coffee room were provided.

## **Overseas Trips, 1967 to 1973**

I travelled overseas once during each year of my period as Director, usually in response to an overseas invitation which covered my expenses. The timing and reasons for the trips are set out below.

### **18 November to 10 December 1967**

The primary purpose of this trip was to make enquiries in England and the United States about possible candidates for the Chair of Microbiology: none were found. I also attended a small working party on Smallpox, sponsored by the USA-Japan Cooperative Medical Science Program and held in Honolulu.

### **6–23 November 1968**

Financed by the US National Institutes of Health, this trip was to attend two conferences, one in Princeton, New Jersey, on 'Influenza Virus Genetics and Vaccines' and the other, in London, on 'Microbiological Standardization of Rubella Vaccines'. At their request, I made a four-page summary of the latter conference for the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories.

### **23 March to 30 April 1969**

In retrospect, this was one of the most important trips that I made, for it was my introduction to the Intensified Smallpox Eradication Program of the World Health Organization. What was called 'The WHO Informal Conference on Monkeypox' was held in Moscow and brought together for the first time a number of poxvirus experts. Their role at this meeting was to decide whether human monkeypox, recently discovered in West Africa, might indicate that there was an animal reservoir of smallpox virus, which would have made eradication impossible. I was rapporteur for the conference, which concluded that monkeypox and variola viruses were different species of orthopoxviruses.

I then went to England, where I made enquiries in London, Oxford and Leeds connected with vacant chairs and new developments in the John Curtin School and, at the request of David Catcheside, the Research School of Biological Sciences. In the United States, I gave a lecture on Conditional Lethal Mutants of Animal Viruses at the National Institutes of Health, and then went to the University of California at Davis for two weeks, as Life Sciences Lecturer. Besides visiting laboratories and giving seminars to graduate students, I gave two public lectures: 'Evolutionary Changes in an Infectious Disease' and 'Civilization and Infectious Diseases: the Effect of Social Organization on Human Infections'.

### **3 June to 3 July 1970**

The main purpose of this trip was to give the Lilly Lecture of the Royal College of Physicians, on Genetic Aspects of Virus Diseases. It was first given as the

concluding item of a conference on Virology for General Physicians held at the College headquarters in London and repeated a week later in Sheffield.

### 3 September to 7 November 1970

On 9, 10 and 11 September, 1970, I gave the CIBA Lectures at Rutgers University and three lectures on different aspects of the genetics of animal viruses. I then went on to spend about a month as Scholar-in-Residence at the State University of New York, spending four or five days at each of its campuses: Stony Brook, Albany, Syracuse, Buffalo, Binghamton and Downstate.

### 12 June to 6 July 1971

The main purpose of this trip was to attend the Second International Congress for Virology in Budapest. Much of my time was taken up with meetings of the International Committee on the Nomenclature of Viruses, of which I was then President. I also visited and gave seminars at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, the Max Planck Institut für Virusforschung in Tübingen, in Germany, the Institute for Microbiology and Epidemiology in Prague and the Institute of Virology in Bratislava.

### 14 December 1971 to 24 March 1972

This was the first stage of a 12-month long Fogarty Fellowship of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). This was a prestigious award, with all expenses paid, an allowance of \$US30,000 per annum and a medal. I was not able to take it for the full 12 months, but arranged with the authorities to take in three sessions. For this first session I lived in Stone House, the original residence on the property that became the campus of the NIH. Other Scholars in residence at the time included an old friend from my Rockefeller Institute days, Rollin Hotchkiss, and Nobel Prize winner Ragnar Granit, of Sweden. I spent almost all of my time there working on the second edition of *The Biology of Animal Viruses*, but gave the luncheon address at the Eighth Gustav Stern Symposium in New York and seminars at Johns Hopkins University, Cold Spring Harbor and the National Institutes of Health. I also gave the opening address at a symposium in Israel and three seminars at the Hadassah Medical School, and then attended the fifth meeting of the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) in London.

### Lectures in Australia

One important role of the Director of the JCSMR at that time was to give lectures widely in Australia on matters of interest to the general public as well as others to explain the activities of the School. I gave a number of such lectures, few of which were published, as well as many on various aspects of virology. Several deal with environmental problems, because at the time I was a Vice-President

of the Australian Conservation Foundation and Chairman of the National Committee on Problems of the Environment of the Australian Academy of Science.

They were:

- 1968 'The Structure and Activities of the John Curtin School', at the Melbourne, Monash, Sydney and Queensland Universities.
- 1970 'Man and his Environment in Australia', to the First International Congress on Domiciliary Nursing.
- 1970 'James Cook and the Prevention of Scurvy', to the Royal Society of Queensland, on the Cook Bicentenary.
- 1970 'Infectious Disease and Social Change', to the Canberra Postgraduate Committee on Medicine.
- 1971 'How Many Australians? Immigration and Growth', to the Australian Institute of Political Science Summer School (Fenner, 1971).
- 1971 'Population and Resources, Local and Global', to Canberra Hospital Medical Seminars.
- 1971 'Abortion, Medical Questions', to the ANU Centre for Continuing Education.
- 1971 'Migration and Australia', to the Australia Party.
- 1972 'Is There an Environmental Crisis?' an ANU Public Lecture.  
'The World Situation in Resources and Some Implications for Australia', for *The BHP Review*, Summer 1972.
- 1972 'The Environmental Crisis—Population, Resources, Pollution', at Cessnock, New South Wales.

## Writing Textbooks

Before I became Director, I had thought that I would like to continue with some laboratory research and had made arrangements to have space in the Department of Microbiology. However, I found that if I were to be available whenever wanted for committee meetings and meetings with staff, I could not have the long breaks I needed for bench research. Further, I knew that I could not carry out laboratory work through research assistants or PhD students, without 'getting my hands dirty'. The one PhD student that I had at the time I accepted the Directorship was Bob Blanden, who was completely independent and produced some excellent papers from his thesis material. However, at that time, the directorship was not a full-time job. I had already assisted Burnet with a book and written two others, *Myxomatosis* and *The Biology of Animal Viruses*, so I thought that I would write some more books.

## A Textbook on Medical Virology

I had always felt somewhat guilty being called a Professor, having never given a course of lectures (I was never invited to lecture to students in the Faculties),

and now I was never likely to. So I thought that I might occupy the spare time I had, always early in the morning before anyone else arrived and at irregular times on most days, to write a textbook on virology for medical students. I persuaded David White, an early PhD graduate (1960) from the Department of Microbiology, who was by then Professor of Microbiology at the University of Melbourne, who I knew to be a first-class teacher of virology, to be a co-author. The first edition, entitled *Medical Virology* and 390 pages long, was published by Academic Press in 1970. It received excellent reviews and sold very well. M. A. Epstein, writing in *Nature*, said, amongst other things:

Despite the risk of writing a rave notice, I am still filled with wonder on reflecting on the seeming ease with which extremely complicated topics [have] been reduced to an orderly survey of the basic facts involved, together with suitable explanations of their significance. This book can be used, therefore, both as an introductory textbook and as a very reliable and solid reference book.

We also received many complimentary letters and expressions of interest in using the book as a textbook. A Spanish edition was published in 1973.

### ***The Biology of Animal Viruses, Second Edition.***

The first edition of *The Biology of Animal Viruses*, published in 1968, had sold very well, but by the early 1970s clearly needed updating. The rapid advances were primarily in molecular virology, in which I lacked expertise, so I enlisted the help of three former students (Brian McAuslan, Joe Sambrook and David White) and one former staff member (Cedric Mims) as co-authors. We agreed on who should take primary responsibility for each chapter, then all authors should read each chapter, and, finally, I edited them so that there was a uniform style and a minimum of overlap. The Memorandum of Agreement with Academic Press was signed in March 1971 and the second edition published in hardback in 1974. The reviews were good; Kenneth Berns in *American Scientist* said:

In spite of the multiple authorship, the text is uniform and cohesive and may come close to being the universal source in animal virology. Its general sections serve admirably as an introduction for anyone who has had a basic biology course, while other sections contain well-organized compendia of the known facts concerning specific viruses and other aspects of virology...The book is a must...for all individuals interested in animal virology.

Since many of those interested in the book complained that the price was too high, after several thousand copies of the hardback had been sold the publishers produced a soft-cover 'Students' Edition' for about half the price. Total sales exceeded 11,000 copies. A Russian edition, translated by my friend Vladimir Agol, who I had met in Moscow in 1964, was published in 1976. Between 1976

and 1981, I received 36 requests from other authors wishing to use diagrams or tables contained in that book.

## **Other Activities, 1967 to 1973**

### **Chairman, Committee to Examine the Possibility of Establishing An Undergraduate Medical School in the ANU**

An Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Medical Education in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) was first established in 1965 and a major conference on Medical Practice and the Community held in the JCSMR on 26–30 August, 1968. In 1968, a new Committee on Medical Education in the ACT was set up and the Vice-Chancellor asked me to act as Chairman, but the detailed plan was carried out by a subcommittee chaired by Malcolm Whyte. Its report was debated by an expanded Committee in November 1969, circulated to the Boards of the Institute of Advanced Studies and of The Faculties in 1970. After much further discussion, the Vice-Chancellor told Council that the proposal was academically sound, that questions of shielding the rest of the University from any adverse effects had been ‘fully answered in policy terms by the Australian Universities Commission (AUC) and by the Government’ and that talks which Professors Fenner and Whyte had had with the health authorities and medical fraternity pointed to the probability of a satisfactory agreement on the integration of medical education and the local health services’. The proposal was submitted to the AUC in April 1971, but a decision was deferred until completion of the report of a Committee on Medical Schools set up by the Minister for Education and Science in June 1972. In July 1973, this report recommended deferment of the ANU proposal for a further three years, although new medical schools were approved at James Cook University and at the University of Newcastle. A Medical School was finally set up in the ANU in 1998 and accepted its first students in 2004. Its administration is housed in a building that was named the Frank Fenner Building in May 2003 (it should have been the Malcolm Whyte Building!).

### **Committee to Examine the Possibility of Establishing A Centre for Natural Resources (see Fenner, 1973a, 1979)**

The notion that the ANU might embark on some activity in an area called ‘resources’ arose at meetings of the ANU academic boards in 1965, when the Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported on the conclusions of the committee that had looked into the question of medical education in the ACT (see above). Some members of the Board suggested that other faculties such as agriculture, veterinary science or rural science should also be considered. The committee that was set up dismissed these suggestions, but the Universities Commission supported the idea that something should be done about a body to examine renewable natural resources. In November 1967 it was decided that a committee should be established to examine the feasibility of establishing a ‘Centre for

Natural Resources' in the ANU. Following receipt of a positive recommendation from this committee, the Universities Commission approved the Statement of Intent in its 1969 Report. The Vice-Chancellor, Sir John Crawford, then set up a new committee, which he asked me to chair, to consider the establishment of a Centre and Research School for Natural Resource Studies. Recast in a more modest form, a proposal for a Centre for Natural Resources (CNR), dated 1970, was part of the ANU submission to the AUC for the 1973–1975 triennium. After the report was submitted the committee decided that the word 'environment' should be included in the title, and the need for a convenient acronym gave rise to the name Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES). In its Fifth Report, published in August 1972, the AUC explicitly endorsed two proposals in environmental studies, one in ANU (CNR/CRES) and one in the University of Melbourne.

## CSIRO and Medical Research

Among my extra-curricular responsibilities as Director was membership of the Advisory Council of CSIRO, and at its meeting in May 1972 the Council asked me to report to it on CSIRO and Medical Research. I submitted a draft report at the Advisory Council meeting in May 1973, which was approved in a general sense by the Council. During the next few months I had extended correspondence and personal discussions with Dr D. N. Everingham, the Minister for Health and Dr J. R. Price, Chairman of CSIRO. The final report (Fenner, 1973b) was submitted to the Advisory Council in October 1973, and contained three recommendations to CSIRO, which were accepted by the Executive, and two to the Australian government concerning medical research, which were not accepted. The recommendations to CSIRO were:

1. to establish a CSIRO Committee on Medical Research,
2. to review its official attitude on medical research in CSIRO,
3. to establish a Division of Human Nutrition.

The last and most important recommendation was implemented in 1975, when the former Division of Biochemistry and Nutrition, located in Adelaide, was converted into the Division of Human Nutrition.

## International Committee on the Nomenclature (Taxonomy) of Viruses

I had long been interested in viral taxonomy (Fenner, 1953) and in 1966 I was elected a foundation member of the International Committee on the Nomenclature of Viruses, which was established at the International Congress for Virology in Moscow in September 1966. The driving forces were C. H. Andrewes and André Lwoff. Although I was booked to go to that Congress, I could not attend, since a few weeks earlier I had contracted appendicitis while in the United States,

then flown to Glasgow where I was confined for two weeks in the Glasgow Infirmary before returning immediately to Australia. The International Committee operated through a number of Study Groups, each consisting of specialists in a particular group of viruses. I was a member of the Poxvirus Study Group from 1966 until 1990, when I resigned.

It was arranged that apart from correspondence, the Committee would meet every five years, at each International Congress of Microbiology. Because of commitments at ANU, I was unable to get to the next International Congress in Mexico City in 1970, but in my absence I was elected President of the Committee until the next Congress, which was in Madrid in 1975. As Chairman, I attended meetings of the Executive Committee in London in 1968 and 1973. At the latter meeting it was agreed that a number of changes should be recommended to the next meeting of the Committee, in 1975, including that its name should be changed to the International Committee for the Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV). Two meetings of the Executive Committee were held in Madrid, at the first of which a plant virologist, R. E. F. Matthews, was elected President (because of concern that the plant virologists would decide not to operate through ICTV, I pushed hard for Matthews' election). A meeting of the full International Committee, spanning two days, passed a large numbers of amendments to the Rules of ICTV. As outgoing President, I was elected a life member of ICTV.

After each meeting, the outcomes in terms of rules and names and classification of vertebrate, invertebrate, plant, fungal and bacterial viruses were published in *Archives of Virology*. In addition, the outgoing president produced a book setting out descriptions of the currently agreed genera and species (Wildy, 1971; Fenner, 1976; Matthews, 1979). As an illustration of the enormous increase in knowledge of viruses in the 20 years since 1980, the seventh report (van Regenmortel et al., 2000), is 1,162 pages long.

## Honours and Awards

- 1967      Britannica Australia Award for Medicine.
- 1969      Life Sciences Lecturer at the University of California at Davis.
- 1970      Lilly Lecture, Royal College of Physicians, London.  
CIBA Lecturer in Microbial Biochemistry, Rutgers University, New Jersey.
- 1971      Victor Coppleson Lecturer, Australian Post-Graduate Medical Foundation.  
Fogarty Scholar, US National Institutes of Health.
- 1973      David Memorial Lecture, Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science.

## Overview: the Role of the Director

My period as Director coincided with the Vice-Chancellorship of Sir John Crawford, whom I had met 10 years before as a colleague in a Saturday tennis group. My wife, Bobbie, became a friend of his wife, Jess, and the four of us used to meet on Saturday nights, alternately at each other's homes, for bridge. Crawford was a man of great ability and industry, a superb chairman of committees and a creative Vice-Chancellor. In that capacity, he called on senior administrators such as the directors of research schools to act as Chairmen of university-wide committees to examine new proposals. He asked me to be Chairman of Committees to examine proposals to establish an Undergraduate Medical School and a Centre for Natural Resources (later the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies) in ANU, as described earlier.

On 1 May, 1973, I resigned from my position as Director of the John Curtin School to become Director of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies. Since there was a meeting of the ANU Council that day and I was scheduled to present my annual 'Director's Report to Council', I decided to give an overview of my six years as Director. After outlining the changes described earlier in this chapter, I set out my views on the role of the Director in a research school like the John Curtin, as follows. What follows must be viewed in the context of the times, the 1960s and 1970s:

Finally, may I record my personal views on a matter that is widely debated in the Institute, the role of the Director. It is clear that the requirements and opportunities differ in the different research schools, and at different periods during the development of each School. In the early stages there is no doubt of the necessity of having a senior academic as the first Head of School. In JCSMR, Florey fulfilled this role in its formative first decade of development. In a developed school (if such ever exists!) I am not so sure that one need have a person of academic eminence if the job is looked at purely from the point of view of running the School. Looking back on my five and a half years of office, there have been few occasions on which I have been conscious of providing academic leadership. In JCSMR interdisciplinary work, quoted in the paper setting out the duties of a Head of School as one of his responsibilities, is regarded with considerable suspicion by most members of the School. It is a School of highly diverse and self-contained departments, and it is the departmental heads who must provide the real scientific leadership. As I have already indicated, there have been several new academic developments in the School over the last six years. These have all been the result of discussion and debate in Faculty Board and Faculty; as Director I have merely acted as Chairman of these bodies. The only positive suggestion that I made, for a Department of Human

Genetics to replace the Department of Genetics when that department transferred to the Research School of Biological Sciences was transformed into the rather different subject of Human [Population] Biology.

Much of the time of the Director is occupied in chairing meetings of committees within the School, in representing the School on University Committees, and with making decisions on what are essentially minor details of administration, such as the ranking of laboratory craftsmen, technicians or secretaries. Any experienced academic with administrative competence could do these jobs. However, it is likely that only a distinguished medical scientist would command the support of heads of departments within the School, and the respect of the Vice-Chancellor and his colleagues on the Heads of Schools and Budget Advisers' Committees to the extent that is necessary to represent the School's viewpoint on these bodies.

In addition to his responsibility to Council for running the research school, I believe that the Director of a developed School like JCSMR has real opportunities to make constructive contributions to the University as a whole; and on a wider scene, if he has the mind to do it, to Australian public life. I believe that this outside work will continue to be perhaps the major attraction of the position. The position of Director of a Research School in the ANU is highly respected in Australia and overseas, and the Director is free from the pressing need that a departmental head has of providing continuing scientific leadership in a narrow discipline. In my own term of office, I believe that apart from writing two major books on virology, my major satisfaction has come from the contributions I have been able to make to the University outside JCSMR, in four areas of innovation. In none of these would I claim to have been the prime mover, but I believe that I have been able to exert a useful influence on each. These are: (a) the development on an experimental scale of the Human Sciences Program, initiated this year in the School of General Studies [Faculties]; (b) support for the planning, primarily by Professor H. M. Whyte, and for the promotion through University Committees and the Australian Universities Commission of the proposal that the ANU should develop a Faculty of Medicine in the near future; (c) the development of the idea, published as an appendix of the Fourth Report of the Australian Universities Commission, that ANU should initiate activity in relation to renewable natural resources to its realization as a more broadly based Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies; and (d) the establishment, following initiatives of Professors Bishop and Whyte, of the Postgraduate Committee in Medicine of the ANU.

I believe that a similar range of opportunities exists for the next Director of the JCSMR. If the government agrees to proceed with the development of a Faculty of Medicine, it is of the utmost importance to the JCSMR in particular and to the University as a whole that this development should proceed with full harmony and understanding between the John Curtin School and the Faculty of Medicine. There is an opportunity for major interaction of mutual value to occur between these two large and important components of the University, and the next Director could play a crucial role in realizing the full potential of a situation that is unique in Australia, perhaps in the world.

I believe that Headships of Departments are the most important positions in the John Curtin School. They require sustained and full-time effort if the departmental head is to supply the leadership within his department and in Australian science as a whole that his position calls for, for these are the premier positions in their respective fields in Australia. I therefore wholeheartedly support Council's view that a Head of School should not be at the same time the Head of a Department. As far as the term of appointment of a Director is concerned, five or at most seven years should be long enough for a man to make any contributions that he is able to make; after that time a new point of view is needed. It is also long enough, if I may say so, for someone to go on attending to the rather boring and trivial administrative details that inevitably fall to the lot of a Head of School. However, except in exceptional circumstances I believe that the term of office should not be less than five years, if a Head of School is able to follow through any of the developments initiated during his term of office. Looking back over the last six years, I find that all the new academic developments that have occurred in JCSMR over that time were set out explicitly in the Australian Universities Commission Submission for the 1970–72 triennium, which was produced during my first six months in office... The worst decision of all, in a large and diverse School like JCSMR, would be to accept the notion of rotating 'deanships'. By deflecting the energies of successive departmental heads from their primary role of scientific leadership of their departments, such a procedure would effectively weaken a series of departments in turn. It would also be likely to provide a guarantee that the *status quo* would be maintained indefinitely, in a world in which the demands made on the University and research schools are constantly changing.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the generous support that has always been provided to the activities of JCSMR by Council and by the administrative officers of the University; especially, since our terms of office largely coincided, to our recent Vice-Chancellor, Sir John Crawford.

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