



Discourses of expectations:
how should universities respond to
students, employers and society?

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Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

- Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training

This presentation

- 1) Questions of obligation:** what is the basis of the claim that universities be responsive to stakeholders' expectations?
- 2) Conflicting claims:** What are the *tensions between competing stakeholder* claims?
- 3) Missing voices:** What perspectives and *voices are missing*
- 4) Policy logic:** what assumptions were made about how the HE system would respond to the policy
- 5) Lessons:** What are the *lessons* for future higher education policy

Background

- Context: competing discourses of higher education ‘Traditional’ vs. ‘Market-based’
- **‘Traditional’**—main curriculum consideration was disciplinary integrity
- **‘Market-based’** —main curriculum consideration responsiveness to stakeholders

Policy Origins

- Discourse about **stakeholder responsiveness** first came to prominence in the 1990s and 2000s in Australia –a series of commissioned policy reports and policy statements on HE
- Raises philosophical, political and practical questions

Original claim

- Ivory towers.....
- Main claim
 - Universities were ivory towers and did not prepare students adequately for society
 - Assumes instrumental view of HE

Arguments for responsiveness

- **“He who pays the piper calls the tune”**
 - Obligation to respond to economic and social objectives of **government** (taxation funding)
 - Obligation to **students** (student funding)

Financial rather than pedagogic argument—
assumes a transactional relationship between
purchasers and providers (government and
students as purchasers)

Arguments for other stakeholders

- Nominated other stakeholders
 - Obligation to include **employers** (economic growth)
 - Obligation to include **professional associations** (external oversight)
- Prioritises economic growth over other possible 'goods' like **public interest, cultural development, social need or 'happiness'**

What happened

- Changed relationships between universities and students ('students as customers')
- Increased power of professional associations (professional associations shape curriculum)
- University managers became 'proxy stakeholders' (intervene in curriculum to enforce the supposed expectations of other stakeholders, e.g. through graduate attributes)

Tacit Assumptions

- Philosophical: Instrumental view of university education (contentious)
- Political: Education is a 'normal' product that can sold in a 'normal' market (contentious)
- Philosophical: Stakeholders expectation should be accommodated (discussed here)
- Practical: Possible to accommodate diversity of stakeholder expectation in curriculum design (discussed here)

Problems

- ‘Stakeholder groups’ have **diverse and contradictory** expectations (both within and between groups)
- **Other stakeholders groups** have possible claims
- Some expectations may not be **legitimate or feasible**

Diverse competing expectations

- **Within groups** –e.g. students have diverse expectations about what they will gain –instrumental vs. holistic intellectual development
- **Between groups** –e.g. some students expect to be rewarded for progress made (formative) professions expect minimum standards of achievement (summative)
- **Competing claims** –expectations of students, expectations of employers and professional associations. Case study: graduate attributes/ accreditation requirements and disability support

Alternative 'stakeholder' claims

- Obligation to public interest and independent critical thinking (**public intellectuals**)
- Obligation to social need (**advocacy groups**)
- Obligations to future clients of professions (**service users**)
- Obligations to disciplinary integrity and new knowledge (**academics**)

Legitimacy of expectation

- Not all expectations are legitimate or realistic
 - students who expect to pass based upon attendance without independent study;
 - employers who expect graduates to fit into work without induction and on-the job training;
- Some university marketing colludes with unrealistic expectations ('university fits around your life')

Expectation and curriculum

Perspective	Expectation	Curriculum processes
Disciplinary integrity	Advance disciplinary knowledge	Academic as expert/ academic standards balance between canon and new knowledge
Student expectation	Diverse	Co-design/ adaptation Individual formative development
Employer expectation	Graduates are 'work-ready' – also diverse	Graduate attributes Focus on transferable 'soft skills' and fit with workplace
University managers	Money from teaching will subsidise research	Profit Only offer courses that will generate a surplus. Design curriculum to reduce cost
Profession education	Provide professional preparation codified by the profession	Professional standards/Accreditation Curriculum aligns with professional requirements
Clients of profession	Competent, 'do no harm'	Ethics and character Competence and ethics
Tax-payers	Money is well spent	Parsimony money for teaching spent on teaching
Policy: Education for societal betterment	Better society, wise people	Courses offered match social needs; Social value of what is taught, practical wisdom
Policy: Education for Economic growth	'Clever Country' graduates lead to high value growth	Courses offered match with economic opportunities; economic value of what is taught

Expectation and Curriculum

- “This is where the rubber hits the road”
- **Pedagogically important** to understand students, and employers expectations when designing curriculum –but must choose which expectations to attempt to meet
- **Dialogue** to explain choices made
- **University marketing and policies** must not encourage students’ or employers’ unrealistic expectations
- **Contemporary choice** of stakeholders unbalanced

Summary

- From a curriculum perspective
 - incompatible expectations cannot be satisfied, but provide a starting point for dialogue
- Honesty in university marketing –
 - must stop colluding with unrealistic expectation
 - University policies must resource academics to deliver courses as promised by university marketing
- Problem of boundaries with stakeholder approach
 - other stakeholders and perspectives have claims that may need to be accommodated at all policy levels
 - Alternative perspectives become more important in post-industrial, post-growth society –meaningful post-work life

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