

Serial number 0066
Title Discourses of expectations: how should universities respond to students, employers and society?
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Outline of paper: The theme of this conference raises many interconnected philosophical, political, ideological, educational, ethical and practical questions about purpose, power and control in higher education. In this paper, I will explore the discourse about university responsiveness, and the bounds of its legitimacy. Secondly, I will explore how responsiveness has informed past and present HE policy in Australia. Finally, I will examine implications of this analysis for future HE policy in Australia and elsewhere.

Questions explored include:

- 1) How the idea that universities should be responsive to stakeholders' expectations came to prominence in Australian higher education policy, benefits, limitations and where conflicts arise
- 2) Assumptions of policy makers when they formulated HE policy in Australia around stakeholders responsiveness
- 3) Outcomes of the policy changes, and
- 4) Learning for future policy makers

Significance: These questions are worthy of attention for a number of reasons. Firstly although the moral claim that universities ought to be responsive to stakeholders' expectations is frequently accepted uncritically in educational research, see for example (Moore et al., 2008), the claim is not self-evident, and depends upon acceptance of a number of ideological assumptions that need to be carefully examined. The claim is also complex because 'stakeholder expectations' do not always align (either within or across 'stakeholder groups'), and stakeholders' expectations may also be ill-informed, unreasonable or self-interested. Even if the stakeholder approach is accepted, these observations raise additional questions about how universities *ought* to weigh their response to diverse stakeholder expectations. Finally, to evaluate whether policy changes intended to improve university responsiveness have been successful, it is necessary to have a well-developed understanding of these issues as well as the 'policy logic' that underpinned policy changes. Policy logic includes assumptions about how the higher education system operates and how it is expected to respond to specific policy changes.

Discussion: This presentation will not be able to address all these issues but will focus on

- 1) **Questions of obligation:** What are the strengths and limitations of the claim that universities *ought to be* responsive to stakeholders' expectations?
- 2) **Conflicting claims:** What are the *tensions between competing stakeholder* claims that universities should meet their expectations?
- 3) **Missing voices:** What perspectives and *voices are missing* (or have been ignored)? How have the expectations of some stakeholders been excluded or marginalised from the 'reforming' discourse?
- 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

Methods: This research combines documentary study of higher education policy in Australia in the 1990s and 2000s with case studies to provide examples of how expectations of different 'stakeholder' groups diverge, where they are in tensions, what voices are missing.

I begin by reviewing historic Australian policy documents to identify how and when the assumption that universities *ought* to balance expectations of students, society and stakeholders became normalised in higher education discourse in Australia, what assumptions were made and how this concern was used subsequently to reform and reshape Australian higher education policy. I will review

- 1) arguments used in policy to support the case for university responsiveness to stakeholders' expectations,
- 2) assumptions made when stakeholder groups were identified,
- 3) how stakeholder expectations were characterised,
- 4) how conflicting expectations would be managed,
- 5) how policy encouraged university responsiveness
- 6) assumptions about how policy would change practices in university

I will conclude with a brief snapshot policy outcomes in terms of how higher education practices changed, and the implications for power relationships between stakeholders.

Background: In Australia, claims that universities were not sufficiently responsive to the expectations of employers or students provided the central rationale for 'reforms' of higher education (Kemp, 1999, ACNielsen Research Services, 1999). The claim raises a number of different educational, ethical and practical questions. From an educational perspective, the claim raises questions about the educational role and mandate of universities, and whether and how that mandate is related to the expectation of those who pay for education.

These claims provided an important rationale for reforms instituted in Australia over the last thirty years, and now commonly referred to as neo-liberal approaches (or marketization) of higher education. Under neo-liberal models of service provision, users pay for services and services providers are expected to provide services to meet (or exceed) the expectations of customers. Along with many others (Deming, 1986), I have argued that the educational relationship is qualitatively different from a customer (or consumer)/ service provider relationship. To reduce the teaching-learner relationship to a service provider-consumer relationship subverts the process of education. Stakeholder approach has been used to understand relationships within the university system (Miller et al., 2014) notwithstanding some criticisms of stakeholder theory more generally (Weiss, 1995, Malan, 1995).

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