

Constructing and Managing the Policy "Problem" of
Tertiary Entrance: a case study of Queensland
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This paper provides a critical policy analysis of the processes involved in the creation of a new mode of tertiary selection in Queensland during 1990. The interest here is in the interactive processes of the Viviani Review, in its passage from the intended to the actual. More specifically, the paper documents and analyses the creation of tertiary selection as a policy "problem", and considers the development of a policy "solution" within a "reforming" political context associated with the new Goss government. Drawing from Offe (1975, 1984, 1985) and others, the paper concludes that policy problems are not self-evident, but constructed, and are not solved, but managed.

In exploring the "problem" with Queensland's Tertiary Entrance Score (TE Score) and the "solution" that The Review of Tertiary Entrance in Queensland (the Viviani Review) proposed, this paper is concerned with the 'carriage' (Dempster, 1987) from 'intended policy' (that desired by the relevant interest groups) to 'actual policy' (here, the policy report) (Ball and Bowe, 1991). Research would suggest that in the further movement to 'policy-in-use' (system and school implementation) (Ball and Bowe, 1991), policies are not 'frozen texts' (Crump, 1991) but are modified and contested throughout the passage to implementation (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987). The research reported here indicates that the move from the construction of a policy problem to an actual policy involves similarly interactive processes. While focussing on these interactive processes, the paper also recognises the location of policy-making within the broader context of state activity. Such recognition is informed by the position of Offe (1975, 1984, 1985) and others (eg. Ham and Hill, 1984), which asserts that public policy can only be understood against an understanding of the role of, and tensions upon, the state in liberal democracies. Offe argues that the state is subject to two essentially opposing demands from society. It must support the general accumulation of wealth within a buoyant economy, in order to have the resources to respond to democratic pressures for policy coverage, so legitimating the currency of the government and the broader social formation. Also acknowledged within Offe's account, is the impact of the internal structure of the state (both political and bureaucratic) upon how

the state responds to such demands.

Given their opposing expectations, Offe contends that the dual demands of accumulation and legitimation can never really be fully accommodated, only managed within temporary settlements. Offe would, therefore, see the state managing policy problems rather than solving them, with the mode of policy management reflecting the broader accumulation/legitimation settlement of the day. Offe makes a useful distinction between policy responses to such demands. Conjunctural policy, he suggests, operates in times of economic prosperity when the state is able to respond to existing or expected societal demands with increased expenditure and expanded policy coverage. By contrast, structural policy is more prevalent in economic "hard times" and operates with the intention of shaping or channelling demand, constrained within a restrictive budget.

This paper, then, begins with an examination of the current

accumulation/ legitimation settlement within the Australian state, particularly as it relates to the impact of Australian economic policy on the transition between secondary school and university education, with specific reference to the Queensland situation. The discussion continues with a report on research conducted by the author, into the development of The Review of Tertiary Entrance in Queensland (the Viviani Review), exploring the intentions of the policy makers and the way in which these intentions were shaped and channelled into the actual policy document. The research utilised lengthy, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 'elite informants' (Merriam, 1988), Professors Viviani and Wiltshire, and interviews with two 'key informants' (Burgess, 1984), namely Professor Glen Evans and Mr Graham Maxwell both from the University of Queensland and both members of the Review's Reference Committee. These 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984, p.102) were supported by administrative records and documentation utilised throughout the policy process, much of which appears in the form of appendices to the final report.

The broader accumulation/legitimation settlement

Prior to the second world war, Australian economic policy was dominated by the traditional view that the state's role in enhancing the standard of living and the economic security of its citizens, was best pursued by adopting a non-interventionist, laissez-faire approach to the market. The government limited its economic activity to ensuring the protection of private property and the free exchange of goods. With the adoption of a Keynesian model of public economic policy, and the introduction of the modern system of social security during the post war reconstruction period, the Australian state made its first significant moves towards its present complex interventionist nature.

However, it was not until the early 1970s, with the election of the Whitlam Federal Labor government, that intervention of the state became particularly evident and fully Keynesian in its operation. Labor historically had been the party associated with the state and public sector. It was under such a political persuasion that the Australian state sponsored an expansion of spending in the public sector (a conjunctural policy response to the demands of Australian society) and intervention into the operations of those institutions which controlled the supply of money.

Since the mid 1970s Australia has moved towards the structural policy condition. Initially this entailed a ceiling on government spending in the public sector, but since 1983 the Hawke/Keating Federal Labor government has endeavoured to reshape the Australian economy, and has widened economic policy coverage to include the "reform" of Australian education. From 1987 the commonwealth has moved towards the deregulation of the economy (Pusey, 1991), restructured its bureaucratic arrangement in the direction of corporate managerialism (Yeatman, 1990; Pusey, 1991), committed itself to the production of government surpluses (even though in recent times this commitment remains only in rhetoric), and consequently reduced its grants to state governments. Federal Labor's creation of this efficient corporate state (Lingard, Knight, Porter, 1992) has been in response to Australia's current economic problems.

The effects of such managerial arrangements by the federal government can be seen within the policy response to the collapse of Australia's full time teenage labour market. Rather than responding conjuncturally to the demand for such employment with increased spending in the job market, the government abolished unemployment benefits for 16 and 17 year olds and introduced a range of policies geared to increasing retention rates in schools. Such reshaping of demand saw the number of Australian students remaining in school to complete the final year of

secondary education, increase from 36 per cent in 1982 to 71 per cent in 1991 (Beazley, 1992, p.25). In Queensland since 1977 the retention rate has been even higher than the national average, with about 80 per cent of students staying at school to complete Year 12 in 1990 (Viviani, 1990, p.8). With state governments providing about 90 per cent of state school funding, the commonwealth has effectively shifted much of the financial burden of teenage unemployment onto the states. However, while significantly reducing the demand for full time youth employment, in "redeploying" Australia's youth, policies of increased student retention rates have also created an increased expectation of tertiary education; an expectation as yet largely unmet by the nation's universities.

The result, then, is a "bottleneck" at the point of intersection

of upper-secondary education and university entrance. This is most acute in Queensland which 'has the highest level of unmet demand for university places and the lowest rate of participation in university' (Viviani, 1990, p.8) in the country. Recent Queensland governments have attempted to relieve the situation somewhat, the Goss government, for example, funding 1500 additional university places for 1990 entrants (Viviani, 1990, p.11), but from a state government perspective, with fewer resources than the commonwealth, this can only be a short term settlement.

Australia's federal structure whereby schools are largely funded by the state governments and universities by the federal government, creates real difficulties for a policy "solution" in this matter. The same situation, of course, allows for political "scapegoating" in either direction. Viviani, for example, is critical of the 'defacto reorganisation of economic responsibilities' (1991, p.20) imposed on the states by the federal government. She claims that the \$15 million of state government funds that financed the extra places of 1990, even though small in comparison with the billions spent by the commonwealth government on tertiary places, threatens to undermine the 1974 agreement between the states and the commonwealth which saw financial responsibility for universities transferred to the federal level. The commonwealth from its perspective, dismisses claims that it is underfunding universities, blaming the 'poor support [ie. funding] given to technical colleges by the Queensland government for forcing increasing numbers of students into the university and college system' (Dawkins, in Whittaker, 1991). The Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC), however, suggests that 'those who miss out on being car mechanics don't then decide to go into nuclear physics' (quoted in Whittaker, 1991).

The Queensland system of selecting students for university entrance also brings its own particular dimension to the issue of an under supply of university places. Queensland abolished public examinations in the secondary system in the early 1970s following the Radford Report of 1970. From that time a variety of school-based assessments have been utilised, combined with a standardised aptitude test to ensure comparability between schools across the state (see Lingard, 1990). This school-based assessment is overseen by a quasi-autonomous board, most recently the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (the Board), which is also responsible for producing a ranking, until recently known as the Tertiary Entrance Score (TE Score), of Year 12 students seeking entry into university. From the 1970s to the early 1990s university entrance in Queensland was determined through the use of this TE Score (see Gale, forthcoming). As the retention rate of secondary students increased through the 1980s, but was unmatched by the number of places offered in universities, Queensland's TE Score became the focus of discontent for this

unmet demand and transferred what is essentially a federal matter into a state government issue.

Policy intentions - taking shape

Policy intentions are to be found in the policy environment as suggested solutions to what are regarded as policy problems. However, the progression of problems to solutions isn't as linear as at first might be thought, or as is often portrayed by actual policy documents. Constrained by what is possible in a particular context, the construction of intended solutions to problems, in practice often emerges with the construction of "the problem" itself. As Beilharz puts it: 'problems are not given but constructed, agendas are not self evident but are produced as though they were; policy-making is an instrumental exercise which necessarily fails to see itself as such' (1987, p.389). The management of policy problems begins, then, with the shaping of policy intentions.

In the wake of the Fitzgerald Report and amidst the odious smell of corruption which subsequently hung over Queensland's most recent National Party government (Coaldrake, 1987), the possibility of the Queensland branch of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) gaining office at the December 1989 election loomed. Labor mobilised to produce a broad range of policy documents, including education (Lingard and Collins, 1991), which were made publicly available in the lead up to the election. Amongst several significant policy intentions the ALP expressed its desire to 'enhance access to tertiary education' (ALP Policy Document, 1988, p.31), based on the belief that 'too few Queenslanders have gone on to tertiary education' (Schools Policy, 1989, p.1).

Sensing that the public's 'educational philosophy about open access' (Viviani, 1991, p.37) to university was being increasingly frustrated by the widening gap between the demand for university places and the supply of those places, Labor sought an avenue through which to act. The TE Score, the one area in which the state government had maintained a role in the tertiary education environment, provided that avenue. Framing within the TE Score problem their desire for an increase in the number of Queensland university graduates, the ALP campaigned in the lead-up to the 1989 election for the abolition of the TE Score as part of its "Family Commitment" policy. Indeed, the public had already been convinced of the nexus between the TE Score and the supply of university places. In 1975 the first University of Queensland student intake to be selected on the basis of the TE Score, was also the first to be subject to quotas on all undergraduate courses. The public, particularly those who missed out on an offer, found it difficult to discriminate between the new restriction on university offerings and the new method of selecting between students for university places.

Labor's polling of swinging seats in the lead up to the election revealed this strong public support for its tertiary entrance policy and once elected the Goss Labor government was quick to begin the process of moving intentions into action. Concern over the TE Score by University of Queensland academic staff, however, related to its ability to predict the academic performance of university students. Similar doubts had been expressed amongst university academics before. Research into these areas of concern had suggested that from the spectrum of university selection criteria, selection decisions 'have only a very moderate validity' (Furieux, 1961, p.102), and that 'university wastage is not likely to be reduced by increasing the severity of university selection' (Hohne, 1952, p.3). Nevertheless, the University of Queensland Senate in 1981 instigated an investigation into the TE Score system and possible alternatives. The investigation culminated in the Davies Report which was submitted to the senate in 1983, but was not acted upon (Viviani, 1991, p.10). The Board's report of 1987, Tertiary Entrance in Queensland: A Review (the Pitman Report), was similarly abandoned. The Pitman

Report was essentially a response to public pressure, voiced by Mr Lyn Powell, the then Queensland Minister for Education. Many 'saw the problems as being that the TE Score that people got, did not seem to always reflect the levels of achievement they got from school' (Evans, 1991, p.2). The Report sought to take this pressure off the TE Score, but it was not met favourably by the University of Queensland, the dominate tertiary institution in the state, which regarded the Board's intentions as in opposition to its own.

No doubt the policy intentions of the Australian Labor Party and the electoral mandate for change they had received, strongly influenced the newly elected Goss government's position on the TE Score issue. However, Mr Paul Braddy, the new Minister for Education, was also aware of the TE Score problem in finding agreement between significant actors, namely the Board and the University of Queensland, within the policy arena. Such difficulties foreshadowed potential problems of accountability to the electorate if change was not delivered before the next election. Braddy's influence over the construction of the review process (discussed below), reflected his perception of the problematic nature of this impasse to change. For Braddy, the solution involved not only the abolition of the TE Score, but also its replacement with an alternative that was both acceptable to the electorate and to the major stakeholders; a solution that had to be operational before the next election.

The Queensland Department of Education's view was that the TE Score had 'deleterious effects in high schools' (Viviani, 1991, p.26) on the subject choices of senior secondary students and on

the curriculum of secondary schools within the state. Given the task by the minister of writing the Terms of Reference for the Viviani Review, senior officers of the Department aimed to ensure that their intentions would prevail. Indeed some believed that the resulting terms of reference were so directive that they actually defined the solution.

Professor Nancy Viviani, a professor in international relations at the Australian National University in Canberra, was appointed in February, 1990, to review the then current system of tertiary entrance in Queensland and to recommend an alternative system. Although 'solely responsible' for the review and its recommendations (Viviani, 1990, p.iii), Viviani clearly cannot be considered the sole constructor of the TE Score problem label. Nevertheless, her views were vitally important in defining the nature of the problem to be addressed. Personally she was opposed to the use of a single number in assessing tertiary entrants (Viviani, 1991, p.28), and questioned the validity of societal arrangements that restricted university entrance to only a few. However, as a policy-maker Viviani regarded the major problem as one of policy immobility; a stalling of the carriage from intentions to action. Viviani's policy intentions, then, were clear: 'to get this impasse on the road again and to get the policy making process going' (1991, p.27).

Professor Ken Wiltshire, Chair of the Reference Committee to the Viviani Review and professor of public administration at the University of Queensland, also 'thought the TE system was a crumbly system' (Wiltshire, 1991, p.7). However, Wiltshire claimed no preconceived ideas of how its reform might be achieved. Rather, he considered that his contribution to the carriage of policy was grounded more in his role as Chair, to 'keep a committee together, chair it and bring out all the different points of view and consolidate it and coordinate it' (Wiltshire, 1991, p.5). This, he believed, was aided by his neutrality as one removed from the professional field of education. Interestingly, the two significant players (Viviani and Wiltshire) in the policy making process were not educationalists but political scientists.

To assist Viviani in her review Braddy appointed a Reference

Committee with Wiltshire as its chair. The Reference Committee, dubbed by Viviani as 'the cast of thousands' (1991, p.19), was designed by the Queensland government to reflect the areas of concern in the widest possible arena. 'The Minister built just about every interest you could think of into that Reference Committee, so it was definitely comprehensive' (Wiltshire, 1991, p.6). As such, it reflected the widest possible collection of policy intentions relating to tertiary entrance in Queensland. Towards a new tertiary entrance settlement
Perhaps the most obvious evidence of managing these intentions in

their movement towards the final Review document, was the imposition of the strict and limited time frame instigated by the Goss Labor government. Braddy was aware of the legitimisation demands on the government by the Queensland electorate to respond with the promises of their electoral platform (Viviani, 1991, p.7). Graham Maxwell, a member of the Reference Committee and of the Technical Advisory Group to the Viviani Review, similarly recognises that the Review's time parameters were set in order that 'the first fruits of the new system would be occurring before the government was likely to face the electorate again' (1991, p.8).

While wanting to be seen to deliver on their election promises, the new Queensland government was also committed to an ideal: the reform of access to tertiary education in Queensland. It was a reform that the government believed had been a long time in coming and, therefore, deserved immediate action. Certainly Braddy could have adopted a purely "quick fix" mentality by implementing the Board's recently released Pitman Report, which, according to Viviani (1990, p.2) and McGaw (1989), had produced a workable solution. However, while committed to reform, Braddy was also aware of the importance of a resolution that carried the support of the two major stakeholders in the policy arena. While the Pitman Report had drawn on the expertise of several University of Queensland academics, this did not constitute the approval of the University's administration. The Report's implementation would have created a crisis more devastating than the impasse that existed. The preferred alternative was a new 'quick review and recommendations and decisions by June' (Viviani, 1991, p.11).

Such a commitment to a speedy resolution brought with it further constructs that impacted on the policy making process. Given that several potential Reference Committee members had 'started making statements like "this has to take years" ... and it could be seen that those people would delay the whole process' (Viviani, 1991, p.17), Braddy opted to 'decouple the reviewer from the committee' (Viviani, 1991, p.17). This was quite at variance with the normal course of events, that would have placed Viviani as the Chair of a committee collectively responsible for the review. Re-positioned, the reviewer was afforded a far greater say in what constituted the TE Score problems and how they might be addressed.

A further review construct was Braddy's almost simultaneous decision to appoint Viviani as the reviewer, which was based on his belief that the nature of the problems were political rather than educational. Braddy sought someone who was not aligned to a particular interest group but would be held in respect by those groups, who had knowledge of Queensland tertiary entrance, and 'who knows how to bring warring parties together' (Viviani, 1991, p.15). In Viviani, he found such criteria. 'I had no interests, I had status, ... I've known the Queensland system' (Viviani,

1991, p.17), and had a reputation as 'a person who fixes these sorts of problems' (Viviani, 1991, p.15). As previously noted, Viviani came from outside Queensland and outside of education. Wiltshire suggests that his appointment as Chair of the Reference Committee was based on similar criteria. He saw his role not as an expert in tertiary entrance issues, but rather as 'a political

exercise in seeking the support of the stakeholders to the report' (Viviani, 1991, p.18). Evans notes (1991, p.6), with some cynicism, that such appointments by present-day governments are indicative of a corporate managerialist approach to policy making, where generic policy makers are engaged rather than those with a detailed knowledge of the subject. Indeed, this structure of a reviewer and a reference committee seems to have been an effective compromise between new managerialist (Yeatman, 1990) and corporatist (Lingard, 1991) approaches to policy making. The structure of the Reference Committee was another important aspect in the carriage of the policy towards a new method of tertiary entrance. As well as being committed to the widest possible involvement of interest groups on the Reference Committee, Braddy was aware, given the failure of the Pitman Report, of the importance of the particular involvement of the major stakeholders. To this end the Board, represented by the Director, John Pitman, and the University of Queensland, represented by the Registrar, Douglas Porter, brought to the Reference Committee an involvement that the previous Pitman Report had lacked; strong representation by all influential institutional decision makers.

The Queensland Department of Education's involvement in determining the Review's policy carriage through its authorship of the Terms of Reference, has already been noted, as has the restrictive nature of such terms. However, Viviani's position as the 'solely responsible' reviewer enabled her to interpret these terms broadly (Viviani, 1990, p.iii). Indeed, her position gave her access to the Terms of Reference before their publication and provided her with the opportunity to make 'directive statements in the draft terms of reference, indirect' (Viviani, 1991, p.28). By inserting words such as "aim" and "avoid" Viviani 'softened up the language' (Viviani, 1991, p.29). In so doing, Viviani was able to reconstruct the focus of the Review and legitimate the putting to one side of solutions to some problems, to 'be fulfilled ... in the future' (Viviani, 1990, p.iii), while others could be given more immediate attention.

Wiltshire also played a role in shaping policy intentions and channelling them into actual policy. Deciding that the Reference Committee process only required six meetings, Wiltshire determined to educate the committee to 'become totally familiar with the present system, ... [and with] other Australian and other international systems' (Wiltshire, 1991, p.7). So

directive was his involvement that Wiltshire refused to allow discussion or debate on a possible new system until such time as this educative process had been achieved. The intention was to gain agreement amongst the committee on the principles of good tertiary entrance, and the process which Wiltshire employed led the committee to conclude that 'the problems were few and really serious' (Viviani, 1991, p.22).

Viviani, assisted in her task by the Reference Committee, saw the narrowing of the issues within the policy making arena culminate in the recognition of assessment as the major tertiary entrance problem in Queensland. For Viviani, it came down to: 'unless the universities have good information which is reliable, they can't choose the right students. And unless the Board provides that information, you can't actually expect the universities to go along with them' (Viviani, 1991, p.22). That these two major stakeholders also agreed to this interpretation of the TE Score problem, enabled the Viviani Review to turn its attention to other issues within its terms of reference, the recommendations of an alternative tertiary entrance system.

Conclusion

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The political importance ascribed to the abolition of the TE Score was no doubt enhanced by the timing of the election in early December, when senior secondary students had just received their TE Scores (Wiltshire, 1991, p.1).

approaches to policy making.

The research reported here indicates that in the case of the most recent review of tertiary entrance in Queensland, the policy process began with an array of policy intentions all of which could not have been practically and/or logically fulfilled. The reduction of these into an agreed policy intention to reform the assessment of students seeking university entrance, became the task of Viviani as the sole policy maker. That the policy making process did not begin with this premise about the primacy of assessment, is illustrative of Beilharz's contention regarding the constructed nature of policy problems.

However, a dual interest has been the way in which these policy intentions were carried to a point of consensus. I have argued that the mode of managing such carriage is mediated by the broader settlement in relation to accumulation and legitimation. In the Australian context, such demands have witnessed a corporate managerialist response from federal and state

governments; the technical expertise of the manager utilised to appease accumulation demands (Yeatman, 1990, p.35) and the incorporation of designated interest groups into the function of the state, legitimating its subsequent action. Indeed, the policy processes that produced the Viviani Review fits comfortably into this broader settlement. Viviani,

appointed as the sole reviewer, provided the technical expertise of policy maker, drawing professional judgements from the Reference Committee and determining how these might fit together into a coherent whole. Her technical expertise in doing so, supported by Wiltshire, has already been noted. The Reference Committee for its part, changed from being merely a collection of interest groups advancing individual causes, to become part of the extended state, carrying the support of their respective constituents but also exercising a governing role over them. The resulting change to the procedures for selecting tertiary students in Queensland proposed by the Viviani Review, could be viewed by some as a solution to the problems of the TE Score. However, the Review remains a solution only as long as the demands related to tertiary entrance remain in balance. In this regard, then, it is a settlement, reached temporarily rather than finally; a settlement managed through the construction of what is problematic and of the parameters within which problems can be considered.

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In 1989, for example, 12,666 applicants to Australian
universities, representing 30.8 per cent of all those who were
eligible, did not receive an offer of a place, and the gap
between those applicants who are successful and those who are
not, widens with each year (Maiden, in Viviani, 1990, pp.79-80).
The fact that competing notions of the TE Score's problematic
nature, discussed below, were evident, is illustrative of this

constructed quality of the tertiary entrance problem in
Queensland. It is to these constructions that I now turn.
carriage