

THE UNSTEADY ASCENDANCY OF MARKET ACCOUNTABILITY IN AUSTRALIAN AND ENGLISH HIGHER EDUCATION

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Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference

December 2000, Sydney University

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Abstract

Increased accountability is at the centre of widespread educational reforms which feature the rhetoric of deregulation. Not only have educational systems, institutions, and practitioners been required to be more accountable, but arguably the nature of accountability has also changed from professional and democratic to managerial and market forms. In particular, within the hegemonic discourses of the market ideology, market accountability to paying customers has been foregrounded. However, the hegemony is not complete. Governments have often positioned themselves as 'market managers', creating a complex and often contradictory relationship between new forms of market and managerial accountability, layered on top of more traditional notions of professional and democratic accountability.

This paper explores the changing nature of accountability in Australian and English higher education. As we enter the twenty-first century, central higher education authorities in both countries are conducting major reviews and revisionings of mechanisms to enhance the accountability of universities. Whilst acknowledging the potential homogenisation of policy directions with globalisation, this paper analyses policy differences, as well as similarities. The findings of analysis of documents and interviews at both the national level and within particular case study universities in each country are reported. There are significant differences in the ways in which particular policies are produced, received, negotiated, resisted and transformed in the different contexts - hence the 'unsteady' ascendancy of market accountability.

Introduction

The rise of a globalised knowledge-based economy has brought universities in many countries under closer scrutiny for the economic contributions they make. Governments have been particularly concerned that universities serve 'the national interest' in the global marketplace, as for example, the Australian Minister for Education emphasised "universities are big businesses ... education is now one of Australia's major export industries in an intensely competitive market" (Kemp 1999a: 5). Universities are now more accountable to external stakeholders than ever before. There are, however, contradictory tensions in both national accountability policies and subsequent accountability practices within individual universities. This paper reports on a modest study, which aimed to tease out changing accountability policies and practices (1) in and around higher education in Australia and the United Kingdom (with a focus on England) over the two decades from the 1980s to the present, using an analysis of documents and interviews with targeted key informants. Comparisons and contrasts of relevant policies between these two countries are then located within the growing literature on globalisation of education policy.

Accountability is more complex and contested than the commonsense understanding of 'answerability' or 'responsibility' would suggest. Different typologies have been constructed

around the question 'accountability to whom?', but just two are outlined here, in order to assist the analysis in this paper. Corbett (1992) has offered a four-fold typology of public sector accountability as operating upwards, outwards, downwards and inwards. Upward accountability is the more traditional kind and it includes legal and constitutional obligations of public servants in the government itself, and also accountability to the courts and to administrative tribunals. Outward accountability is more recent and involves reporting to, consulting with, and being responsive to client groups and other stakeholders in the community. Downward accountability focuses on a manager being accountable to subordinates, which raises issues of employee participation and industrial democracy. Finally, inward accountability is the most debatable and it involves applying the test of personal conscience in addition to defending actions as conforming to moral standards. Ball, Vincent and Radnor (1997) teased out two broad categories of accountability - market and political. Market accountability involves fulfilling contracts for consumers, and can be subdivided into accountability through service provision and accountability through effective financial management. Political accountability involves those who act on behalf of the electorate being called to account for their stewardship. Political accountability can be subdivided into accountability through elected representatives and outward accountability (increasing direct links with the electorate). Ball, Vincent and Radnor (1997) describe a trend towards the privileging of market accountability (including managerial accountability) over political accountability, and highlight an important distinction that customer responsiveness, which can only address performance of the policy, should not be confused with public accountability, which is required to address the shape and direction of the policy itself. For our purposes in this paper we distinguish four main types of accountability: professional accountability to peers; democratic accountability to the general community; managerial accountability to governments and market accountability to customers.

Situating accountability policies within the dynamics of globalisation

Distinctions have been made between 'globalisation' as world systems which have a life of their own, and 'internationalisation' which presupposes nation-states as the essential unit (Marginson 1999). While our analysis draws on globalisation literature, it makes 'international' comparisons and contrasts in accountability policies in the higher education sectors of the two nation-states of Australia and England - as a starting point to enhancing our understanding of potentially globalising policies and practices. We argue that it is important not to gloss over localised context-specific differences with increasing 'talk' of globalisation, and therefore we wish to tease out some of the details of accountability policy processes in each national context, before making comparisons and contrasts.

There are two main approaches evident in the literature to the concept of globalisation. The first, politically neutral, approach defines globalisation as an empirical reality in terms of the compression of time and space (Robertson 1992) or "action at a distance" (Giddens 1994: 4), particularly associated with instantaneous communications technology. The second approach identifies globalisation as an economic discourse actively promulgating a market ideology. A number of commentators bring the two approaches together, as reflected in Marginson's (1999: 23-24) assertion: "there is no doubt that globalisation has provided a conjunctural fillip for the market liberal paradigm in government. ... The material trends to globalisation and the market liberal knowledge claims about globalisation have drawn together so as to reinforce each other". With respect to education, in the words of Martin Carnoy (1998: 28) "in a nutshell, globalisation enters the education sector on an ideological horse and its effects on education are largely a product of that financially-driven, free market ideology, not of a clear conception for improving education". We take the position that globalisation and an accompanying ideological shift towards the Right operate as mutually reinforcing 'twins'. However, we would argue that the New Right ideology is not necessarily a homogenous entity, but a 'settlement' around sometimes competing interests which vary

from place to place and time to time. Thus, globalisation is a multidimensional dynamic process.

The impact of globalisation has been described in terms of both homogenisation (increasing similarities) and heterogenisation (increasing differences) of national policies (Appadurai 1990). Dale (1999) offers a useful typology of mechanisms through which globalisation affects national policies. He draws a distinction between traditional mechanisms of policy borrowing and policy learning between individual nation-states ('inter-nationalisation') on the one hand, and those mechanisms associated with the new phenomenon of globalisation on the other. These newer mechanisms include:

- harmonisation (such as the European Union model of collective agreement);
- dissemination (such as the OECD's role in agenda setting);
- standardisation (worldwide models such as educational isomorphism evident in common school curriculum categories across countries);
- installing interdependence (driven by concerns common to all humankind such as environmental and peace issues); and
- imposition (countries being compelled to take on particular policies, especially in exchange for financial support).

According to Dale, these latter mechanisms associated with globalisation, are characterised by an external locus of viability; attention to policy processes as well as policy goals; external initiation; a wider range of forms of power; and difficulty sourcing the policy to other individual nations. While Dale (1999: 2) emphasises that "globalisation cannot be reduced to the identical imposition of the same policy on all countries", his typology still seems to emphasise external (top-down) forces acting on individual nation-states to create an increasing degree of policy homogenisation. Taking a somewhat different emphasis, Levin (1998) suggests that policy borrowing and learning may be more symbolic than material in that although new ideas move quickly around the globe, governments will make their own decisions depending on their needs at the time. This perspective allows for more active policy construction at the national level, and therefore greater potential for policy heterogenisation.

Green (1999) has referred to this homogenisation/heterogenisation phenomenon as policy convergence and divergence, respectively. He provides evidence that across Europe and East Asia, although there has been convergence of education policy rhetoric and general policy objectives, there remains divergence of educational structures and processes. In the arena of higher education, Green notes convergence in terms of internationalisation of both reach and curricula of universities, and of particular relevance to this study he notes convergence of widespread interest around new forms of quality control and performance evaluation, which are two key variants of accountability policy. A more detailed examination of convergences and divergences in these policies for Australian and English higher education is offered in the next section.

Accountability policies and practices in Australian and English higher education

Prior to developing an analysis of higher education accountability policies and practices across Australia and the UK (especially England), it is important to identify the ideological framework operating within public sector management generally in each country, along with the implications of these ideological imprints for universities. In both countries in the 1980s,

there was a significant ideological shift which privileged economic discourses in public policy. In Australia of the 1980s, an economic rationalist ideology was progressed by an unlikely tripartite coalition between a Labor Government, and the elite from business as well as the trade union movement. Despite the purported social democratic orientation of the Australian policy elite, with the changing economic climate, globalisation 'talk' and a crisis of legitimation (Dudley and Vidovich 1995), the Hawke Labor Government positioned itself far more to the Right than had traditionally been the case for Labor governments in Australia. This ideological position translated into extensive corporatisation of the public sector, as it was a more politically correct 'settlement' for a Labor Government than full blown privatisation (2). As the 1990s proceeded into the 2000s, the Keating Labor Government and then the Howard Coalition (conservative) Government accelerated the shift to the Right, and the latter adopted more privatisation strategies, especially in the form of contracting out government services. By contrast, in the 1980s, the UK was under the Conservative Thatcher Government, and the coalition of New Right interests revolved around neo-liberals promulgating a market ideology and neo-conservatives urging a return to traditional values (Whitty, Power and Halpin 1998). Arguably, the policy elite in the UK moved down the privatisation route earlier and more clearly than their counterparts in Australia. In the 1990s and into the 2000s, the rhetoric of the Blair Labour Government suggested a stronger orientation towards discourses of citizenship and democratic ideologies, but many commentators have noted the retention of economic discourses in neo-liberal authoritarian public policies, and even an increase in privatisation, albeit with the addition of some humanistic strands (Gewirtz forthcoming). Thus, elements of the New Right ideology were clearly evident, although in differing degrees, despite changes in the ruling parties in both Australia and the UK between the 1980s and early 2000s.

Accompanying the press towards the globalised knowledge-based economy, universities have moved to centre stage of public policy for the potential contributions they can make to the economic well-being of the country. Although universities have been amongst the last bastions of resistance to the economic rationalisation sweeping the public sectors in Australia and England, they too have been under pressure to restructure and reculture in a manner consistent with the New Right ideology. Integral to the ascendancy of economic discourses in higher education in these countries were reforms to create unitary systems (under the common nomenclature of 'university') from binary systems which distinguished traditional universities from colleges of advanced education (Australia) or polytechnics (England). Accompanying the structural changes was a transition from elite to mass higher education, on the (spurious) 'human capital' assumption that more university graduates would ensure more appropriate skills development for the knowledge economy. Not only were the numbers of students participating in higher education much greater, but the diversity of student intakes was also significantly increased. Concerns about these changes were expressed from *within* the sector on two counts. The first concern was that the changing number and nature of students would lower standards (especially given the climate of budget cutbacks facing universities), and the second concern was that the newer universities (former colleges and polytechnics) which had been tightly regulated on an inspectorate model (in contrast to more autonomous traditional universities) would need to be carefully monitored so as not to 'lower the standing' of universities generally. In both Australia and England, these concerns about monitoring standards, from *within* parts of the higher education sector, served to reinforce government discourses on the need for greater accountability of universities to serve the national economic interests, although the underlying rationales were quite different.

The following analysis of accountability policies in higher education in Australia and England (organised into three subsections below) draws on Green's (1999) distinction between convergence of educational policy objectives and discourses, yet divergence of policy structures and processes. In addition to macro level policy objectives/discourses and

structures/processes, we also consider institutional reactions to the relevant national policies in two case study universities in Australia and England, consistent with our view that micro level practices are an integral part of the whole policy process.

Accountability policy objectives and discourses

In **Australia**, the White Paper of 1988 had the clear objective of positioning the Government to bring universities to account for their outcomes: "The Commonwealth ... has a legitimate interest in developing the capacity of institutions to meet their own objectives and to contribute to the achievement of broader national goals of higher education" (Dawkins 1988: 103). The concept of an institutional profile, which was to be negotiated with the Government and which would then form the basis for funding, became the main mechanism used to hold institutions to account. Further, in a major departure from longstanding funding principles, the White Paper foreshadowed the use of performance indicators as a basis for allocation of funds, so that the conceptual link between performance and funding was being established. This link created a potentially powerful mechanism to achieve the policy objective of increasing the accountability of universities to the Government.

By the early 1990s, the policy elite were forging the accountability agenda through the discourses of *performance indicators* and *quality*. However, work to refine specific performance indicators was stalling and there were cautions about the validity and reliability of such indicators (Linke 1991). Within this context, Australia's first 'quality' policy was announced in 1991. The following ministerial quote from the policy illustrates both an economic construction of accountability and the primacy of managerial (upwards) accountability to Government, although the need for market (outwards) accountability to paying customers was also identified:

Those who contribute to the costs of higher education have an interest in ensuring that the system offers value for money. The Government, as the largest provider of funds for higher education, has a particular interest in accountability for the use of public resources. So too do local students making HECS payments, overseas students paying fees and industry whose involvement in higher education is growing. These consumers of higher education legitimately expect to be informed and assured about the quality of provision. (Baldwin 1991: 29)

With the subsequent quality reviews and associated high profile league tables between 1993 and 1995, quality discourses overshadowed those of performance indicators as a key managerial device in Australian higher education. Some observers suggested that a 'quality culture' was emerging (OECD 1997), although one might argue that it was more a 'culture of compliance' as financial levers were used to forge the policy objective of increased accountability. When quality reviews ceased in 1995, quality discourses almost disappeared (a strong indication that they had not been embedded in university culture) and performance indicators again rose to prominence. Approaching the 2000s quality discourses were again resurrected with the creation of a new national quality agency, but this time quality was foregrounded as a marketing device to sell 'Brand Australia' to overseas customers in the international marketplace, rather than as a device to reform the internal management of universities (Vidovich forthcoming). Competition, the centrepiece of a market ideology, was becoming a key organising principle for Australian higher education.

Enhancing the competitive position of Australia was a central objective of the ministerial White Paper on research of 1999. Satisfaction of customers (students and employers) and value for money of public funds were explicitly highlighted:

Competition is strengthening on a global basis and Australia's competitiveness and attractiveness to investors is increasingly determined by our knowledge capabilities. Research - as a key source of knowledge and new ideas - is central to success in the global knowledge economy. ... Perceptions of student and employer dissatisfaction with the quality of research training ought to be addressed, together with a willingness to work with industry. ... Enhanced accountability for the expenditure of public funds and quality assurance mechanisms will be important features of the Government's new framework. This approach is consistent with the Government's commitment to strengthening the international competitiveness of our higher education institutions while reducing regulation and intervention in universities' activities. (Kemp 1999b: 1, 2, 25)

The minister's reference (above) to 'reducing regulation and intervention' continues the persistent rhetoric of balancing university autonomy with requirements for increasing accountability in Australian higher education, although such assertions are becoming less frequent, and arguably less convincing, into the 2000s, as the market ideology takes a firmer hold.

In **England**, the ideological shift which privileged economic discourses in higher education policy appeared to be well entrenched by the time the Green Paper was released in 1985. Discourses of performance indicators had dominated concerns to raise the accountability of universities throughout the 1980s, although relevant reports warned of the inherent dangers, especially pressures towards uniformity. There was also a lack of consensus on key indicators and how they would be tied to funding (Salter and Tapper 2000). The following quote from the White Paper of 1991 points to economic discourses of both managerial (upwards) accountability to the Government and market (outwards) accountability to paying customers, with a focus on competition:

There is a need for proper accountability for the substantial public funds invested in higher education. As part of this, students and employers need improved information about quality if the full benefit of increased competition is to be obtained. As demand for higher education expands further, the Government considers that new arrangements for quality assurance in higher education will be required. (Department of Education and Science 1991: 24)

After this 1991 White Paper, discourses of quality rose to prominence, and by 1995 "the language of quality assurance dominated the discourse of higher education governance" to the extent that an "audit culture" had emerged (Salter and Tapper 2000: 79). A sector-owned quality agency which advocated respect for university autonomy helped to gain acceptance of quality discourses in universities, and although this agency was replaced by one which was government-controlled, arguably the discourses of quality had already begun to colonise universities.

Economic discourses were even more apparent when the new quality framework was announced in 1999. The rationale for the changes was presented in terms of the imperative of consumer demands (market or outwards accountability), and also in terms of a more economically efficient accountability mechanism:

Research into stakeholder needs, particularly that commissioned by the funding councils, points to a demand for information that differentiates between subject providers, and is presented in a simple format that facilitates comparison ... Compared with present arrangements, the new method takes a more efficient and economical approach to the review process, and is likely

to reduce the total amount of staff time that institutions devote to dealing solely with external scrutinies. (Quality Assurance Agency 1999)

The implication in the above quote is also that the new quality framework will reduce the burden of accountability. Regulation and intervention characterised the comprehensive accountability regimes in English higher education throughout the 1990s, but by the 2000s policy discourses are beginning to reflect a sense that simpler and less intrusive (and less costly) mechanisms may be preferred by the policy elite, while still holding firmly to the market ideology.

In **comparing Australia and England**, accountability policy was characterised by varying emphasis on performance indicators and quality in both countries. Discourses of 'hard-nosed' quantitative performance indicators preceded a rise in 'softer' qualitative discourses of quality by the early 1990s in both countries. Arguably, the diffuse concept of quality provided a viable alternative to the proposed use of quantitative performance indicators in a sector where traditional notions of excellence (easily conflated with quality) are highly valued. In the late 1990s, quality discourses were even stronger in England, but almost disappeared in Australia, where performance indicators appeared to prevail. However, the early 2000s in England sees the first publication of performance indicators (no funding attached) and trialing of a new framework for the quality agency. In Australia, a new quality agency will be established in 2001. These changes suggest that discourses of quality are becoming institutionalised in both countries, alongside performance indicators for both research and teaching, thereby creating a powerful double-barrelled accountability regime in the higher education landscape.

Whether the particular discourses revolved around performance indicators or quality in higher education during the period from the 1980s to the early 2000s, governments in Australia and England no longer wanted to focus on inputs (the amount of money they provided) but on measurable outcomes. These governments were most interested in achieving value for (declining) public expenditure (managerial accountability), and increasing responsiveness to customer needs (market accountability). Clearly the expectation was to move away from 'provider capture' (where academics/universities satisfy themselves that appropriate standards are being met) to a situation where academics/universities are more accountable to external stakeholders, with governments operating on behalf of other stakeholders. The economic discourses of accountability were oriented towards enhancing competitiveness in the global marketplace in both Australia and England, and there appears to be a strong convergence of accountability policy objectives and discourses across these two countries.

Accountability structures and processes

In **Australia**, restructuring of the Commonwealth education bureaucracy in 1987/88 to create the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET, later DEETYA and DETYA (3)) signalled that education policy (generally) would become more accountable to THE (reified) economic policy. This restructuring represented a corporatisation of education, and included removal of the independent advisory commissions (with their strong representation from education experts) to be replaced by a less independent, smaller and under-resourced National Board. In higher education, the Higher Education Council and Australian Research Council (councils of the National Board) would provide advice to the minister. The White Paper of 1988 created Australia's 'unified' national system of higher education.

In the early 1990s quality reviews were conducted by the 10 member Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which consisted of 6 sector representatives and 4 industry

representatives, operating under strict guidelines from the minister and Higher Education Council. The policy parameters were to make 'whole institutional' assessments of quality; present findings as published league tables; provide incentives of financial rewards in proportion to institutional ranking; emphasise qualitative rather than quantitative assessments; include both process and outcomes dimensions in the assessments; judge institutions against their missions (within the framework of national objectives) in order to preserve diversity; and protect university autonomy by requiring self-assessment prior to a meta-level assessment by the central quality committee. There was much pressure from the sector (including using Freedom of Information legislation) to make assessment criteria transparent, suggesting that universities were more concerned to satisfy external auditors than to conduct a genuine internal self-reflection exercise which may even work against winning the desired rewards. Although participation in the program was voluntary (also apparently respectful of autonomy), the rewards of money, and more importantly status, were sufficient to keep all 36 public universities 'playing the game' for the three rounds of reviews between 1993 and 1995. The Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was then disbanded.

For the late 1990s, plans were for the Higher Education Council to conduct future quality audits. However, by 1998, this council was also abolished, leaving DETYA to 'call the shots' along the expected bureaucratic line of preference for readily measured and tabulated quantitative performance indicators. Throughout the 1990s, DETYA had worked on the refinement of performance indicators, and produced biennial and then annual performance reports covering all publicly funded universities, but the agenda to link institutional performance with funding was only cautiously developed.

In the research domain, performance has been linked to funding for individuals and teams through the peer-reviewed and highly competitive grants administered by the Australian Research Council (4) since 1988. The 1999 White Paper on research ostensibly enhanced the position of the Australian Research Council by giving it more independent status, through legislation, and making greater financial provision for its administrative functions, although the size of the 'pie' allocated to research has remained static. Running in parallel to the competitive individual/team grants, are an institutional block grants scheme and research training scholarships, which will now be allocated on the basis of performance indicators such as research income and publications. Separate block grants for infrastructure are also allocated on the competitive basis of success in attracting national grants. Thus, a form of market accountability, based on competition within the sector, is now firmly entrenched and Australia is about to witness a much stronger link between performance and funding in the research domain:

The processes for allocating funds for research and research training should be competitive in nature, as simple as possible to administer, and be readily intelligible ... The claims made by researchers and institutions regarding their performance should be open to scrutiny and verification. Taxpayers should be able to identify how public funds have been used and to what effect. The true costs of research and responsibility for meeting those costs should be apparent. (Kemp 1999b: 7)

From the start of 2001 the Australian Universities Quality Agency will conduct compulsory 'whole institutional' quality audits of all universities receiving public funds, using a peer review process. Although the particular processes involved are still to be finalised, audits are to be conducted on a rolling five year cycle which will mitigate against the production of league tables (the most contentious aspect of the 1993-95 reviews). Compared to the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (1993-95) the new quality agency is government-dominated, with 6 of the 9 board members being nominees of Commonwealth

and State governments and only 3 being elected by the sector. Thus, the creation of this agency signals another shift in the balance of power away from universities in the early 2000s.

In **England**, the 1991 White Paper on higher education and subsequent Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 created a unitary system of higher education. Also, the Higher Education Funding Councils were established (to replace separate funding councils for universities and polytechnics), and in the same year the bureaucracy was reformed from the Department for Education and Science to the Department for Education(5).

With respect to quality mechanisms for teaching, the government-controlled Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) had a Quality Assurance Committee which conducted teaching quality assessments. However, running in parallel, the Higher Education Quality Council (dominated by academics) also emerged from the former university-controlled Academic Audit Unit to monitor institutional quality mechanisms. Salter and Tapper (2000) have noted that the HEFCE approach to accountability was more directive whereas the Higher Education Quality Council had a more self-regulatory approach. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was created in 1997 to combine subject reviews (formerly conducted by HEFCE) and institutional reviews (formerly conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council). Although it was the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals which pressured the Government to bring these separate assessments together to reduce duplication and intrusiveness, because the QAA is contractually linked to the government-controlled funding councils rather than universities (as the Quality Council had been), the creation of the QAA signalled another shift in the balance of power away from universities. Further, examining the composition of the QAA Board, it is clear that universities are not well represented in comparison to external stakeholders as only 4 of the 14 members are university representatives (with 4 funding council representatives and 6 independents).

Within one year of operation, the QAA was consulting on a new accountability framework (triggered by the Dearing Report) which was announced in 1999, for full implementation by 2002. The new framework adds an evaluation of 'programme outcomes standards' (in relation to national benchmarks across 42 subjects) to former subject reviews (renamed 'quality of learning opportunities') and former institutional reviews (renamed 'institutional management of standards and quality'). The first will be a threshold (minimum standards) judgement, the second will be a graded judgement (facilitating quantification and comparisons for those so inclined), and the third will be an overall judgement of confidence. The intention is to provide 'greater transparency' of the criteria used for evaluation and 'differential intensity of scrutiny' to reduce the costs of monitoring those institutions which are performing satisfactorily. The former head of the Higher Education Quality Council, Roger Brown (forthcoming), in critiquing the new framework maintained that it is much more comprehensive and complex, and therefore likely to be more costly; that the addition of the 'standards' component will intrude further into academic disciplines; and that the emphasis is more towards third party funders and users than to internal quality improvement. He also notes tensions between the principle of greater transparency against the fact that institutional profiles will not be published ('commercial-in-confidence'), along with tensions between the principle of variable scrutiny against the need for reliable judgements which are *consistent* across institutions. In an apparent government back-off in response to concerns about intrusiveness, proposals to attach funding to teaching assessments and to use non-academic inspectors have not reached fruition.

As with the QAA assessments for teaching, the major mechanism for research accountability, the Research Activity Exercise (RAE) conducted by HEFCE, is a peer review process. Although it is based on a narrative, it also produces a summative assessment as a number on a limited scale, which can readily be used for comparative purposes. The

continued existence of some departments and academic positions have been highly dependent on the RAE ranking - survival being the ultimate accountability. The year 2000 saw a fundamental review of HEFCE, but interviews with senior HEFCE personnel indicated that no dramatic changes would occur to the structures or processes for research accountability, and that there were no plans to bring quality assessments for research and teaching together as the responsibility of a single agency.

Overall with evolving accountability structures and processes in England, there has been a shift in the balance of power from universities to the government, and HEFCE in particular, with its control of research assessment and teaching quality assessments contracted out to the QAA. What the Government saw as 'too little too late' from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, led to Government intervention, and thus the sector was unable to retain internal control of the accountability agenda.

In **comparing Australia and England**, corporatisation of the relevant bureaucracy and advisory bodies, and restructuring to form a unitary system of higher education occurred in Australia in 1987/8, and in the UK in 1992. Major changes to accountability structures and processes in higher education followed in each country. Although there are some clear parallels in the structures and processes, there are also significant differences, as summarised in the subsequent paragraphs.

Similarities include attempts to increase the degree of accountability to governments through a range of agencies and mechanisms (especially performance indicators and quality), and to increase the transparency of accountability mechanisms in both countries. Publication of performance data has significantly increased on the grounds that customers need this information in order to make market choices. Further, governments are maintaining that this information is required to satisfy all stakeholders that value for money is being obtained from public expenditure. Assessment of both teaching and research by peer review has been retained in both countries, but this is firmly located within a framework of national priorities that are set by governments. In both countries, funding drivers have been used by the government in the research domain to create the context of 'keen' competition, which is a hallmark of the market ideology, and thus academics have, *de facto*, become more direct servants of the government in each country. In the teaching domain in both countries, institutional status gained from published teaching evaluations has been the main driver, but this too is market-related in that high status brings advantages in the competitive marketplace for new students. Issues of accountability in international markets for higher education are arising in both countries, and quality agencies in both are in the process of extending regulatory frameworks to include international programs (especially franchising) in the interest of protecting lucrative national income sources from substandard operations. It seems that there have been some 'double standards' in domestic and off-shore operations from both countries. Further, the complexities of accountability for teaching and learning within other national and cultural contexts, including issues of unequal partnerships and cultural imperialism, have not been adequately addressed in either country (although we in Australia have heard of the British intention to conduct 'kitemarking' exercises to bring the international market into line).

One immediately obvious difference between the accountability structures and processes in the two countries is that in England, there were more agencies/bodies involved in monitoring higher education during the 1980/90s, and changes to these agencies were more frequent than in Australia. Other differences include the separation of teaching and research quality assessments to different agencies in England; earlier 'success' in attachment of funding to performance in English research; the greater degree of attachment of numerical rankings to research and teaching performance (which encourage a league table mentality); and the more systematic use of benchmarking and threshold standards in England. All of these

differences point to a greater overall degree of regulation and intrusiveness into the core activities of universities in England. Thus, while at a general level there is some evidence of convergence of structures and processes used to bring universities to account in Australia and England, there is considerable divergence of the particular mechanisms involved.

Instances of 'inter-national' borrowing and learning between these two countries, especially in the quality policy area, can be cited, as for example, initial training for the Australian quality review teams in 1993 was conducted by the Director of the Quality Council in England. However, this flow of influence was not one-way. By 1998, the Director of the Quality Assurance Agency in the UK was saying that the Australian system for achieving accountability through quality in higher education had worked well and represented a 'lighter touch' which the UK would like to follow (Illing 1998).

In addition to influences operating in both directions between England and Australia, both have actively sought influences from specific other countries in developing their accountability policy objectives, discourses, structures and processes. In England, influences from continental Europe - especially the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark - have been identified by key policy makers (interviews). In Australia, Dutch and New Zealand quality experts were invited as keynote speakers to the ministerial workshop which developed new quality policy in 1999 (paid for by the OECD - but that supranational level of influence is yet another story which we do not have time to address here). Yet despite actively seeking inputs from specific other countries to accountability policy development, both England and Australia have chosen to adopt their own unique configurations of policy parameters. For example, an interview with a senior HEFCE officer in England revealed international interchanges, but ultimately the importance of localised context:

Many overseas systems typically the smaller ones, have a high input of overseas reviewers in their research assessment exercise. The Swedes have *only* overseas assessors. ... We've got 600 assessors and 69 panels. We can't do what the Swedes do. ... We are conducting a fundamental review of research policy and looked in detail at four or five systems and our conclusion is that none of them fit our purposes. We're not being insular about this. We're being fairly open to external influences. What would surprise you - the stream of visitors we have in this country from overseas rather interested in the research assessment exercise is really quite extraordinary.

Another example of deliberate national accountability policy differentiation was evident when the Australian education minister announced a new quality agency for universities at the end of 1999. He emphasised a unique Australian model, and was at pains to distinguish the policy structures and processes from those used elsewhere, including the UK:

Any new framework should take into account our federal structure, our universities and our history rather than slavishly adopting a British model (with its expense and intrusiveness), a US model (which involves industry regulation within a very diverse system) or a European model (with its close links between universities and the state (Kemp 1999a: 6).

Institutional practices/reactions

In order to obtain some preliminary sense of how universities in each national context might be reacting to evolving national accountability policy texts, we interviewed people in key management positions in one university in each country. We chose institutions which were positioned in similar ways within their higher education system, and in this instance both were 'traditional' universities and would be characterised as having 'elite' status. These case

study universities have always been ranked highly in both teaching and research assessment exercises and respondents in both universities acknowledged their position of strength. We remain cognisant of the likelihood that different types of institutions will interact differently with national policies. Further, we remain tentative about the study and its findings owing to its limited reconnaissance as a forerunner to more comprehensive data gathering in the two countries.

In the case study university in **Australia**, quantitative performance indicators were far less popular than qualitative judgements about quality, in both the teaching and research domains. Two respondents explain: "I certainly think DETYA tends to get it wrong with performance indicators. ... you do need a degree of professional interpretation" and "performance indicators are too mechanical and they tend to look for very simplistic, pseudo-quantitative measures that can be used to do some statistics whereas quality assurance is much more philosophical ... and does attempt to try to get a more balanced appraisal". Reactions to the 1993-95 quality reviews were generally positive, although as this university was ranked in the top bands on each occasion (and used the fact in advertising), this was not surprising. There were observations that the quality reviews had forged changes in the university, especially in teaching. Senior managers were concerned that there was a 'quality' vacuum after 1995, when it appeared that performance indicators would prevail, and thus they welcomed the announcement of a new quality agency for 2001. However, they emphasised the importance of its independence, as well as representation from the sector: "we would oppose an agency whose powers are too directive" and "it's got to be independent, yet it's also got to have a major input from the sector". Most respondents believed that with the growth in private higher education providers and the imperatives of international marketing, quality assurance becomes increasingly necessary. However, concerns were frequently expressed that general accountability requirements were increasing at the same time that funding was decreasing: "you've got to look at it in terms of the effect on the morale of people ... the resources have been cut so much and they are having to maintain the quality of their programs, and then on top of that you've got this increased reporting of activities".

Managerial accountability to Government was generating considerable negative reaction: "people just get plain irritated at having to fill in a whole lot of forms. A lot of disillusion among staff and not very good morale. ... Most of the stuff that has been implemented is managerialism and not a quality system". However, this university has been positioning itself to actively resist managerial accountability by reducing its financial dependence on Government: "the more self reliant we are financially the more we protect our autonomy.... it's a way of dodging the excesses of government intrusion on the things that ought not be their domain". A second respondent put it another way "we are probably ironically less dependent upon Commonwealth funding than a big private school but we are more regulated than a private school". Another respondent questioned the use to which all the accountability data is put: "we report an enormous amount of data to DETYA ... but it doesn't seem to influence policy". This university reacted against completing annual quality improvement plans for the Government (and stated its resistance publicly in the press) on the basis that it wanted to set its own indicators relevant to its own objectives:

We argued in the last couple of rounds of the profiles that 'no thank you very much. It's not a quality improvement plan we are providing you with. It's a performance report on our quality using quantitative indicators. Now if our outcomes are poor that justifies, perhaps, you having a closer look at our processes. If our outcomes are good, over time you will be able to see quite clearly quality improvement against our objectives'.

There was also strong evidence at this university that senior management was gatekeeping the accountability pressures from Government to reduce the reporting burden on academics:

We try and buffer the academics from the excesses of these external intrusions. Places like my office try to act like shock absorbers with DETYA and try to prevent too much of that intrusiveness going down, but we haven't been able to prevent it all. There is a morale problem and a concern amongst staff that they haven't been defended against the evils of government.

The market ethos was clearly evident in a preference for a deregulated system of higher education in this university. Some respondents focused on a desire for more direct financial contributions from students, and in this context quality is seen more as customer protection. The head of one department identified his view of what was stimulating competition in the marketplace: "they make us competitive by not giving us any money, so we actually have to go off-shore to get students or we perish. ... we don't give two figs about what the government says, quite honestly, they don't pay us - we are very very much client driven".

In terms of the balance between different forms of accountability to different stakeholder groups, there was a unanimous view amongst respondents at this Australian university that universities are broadly accountable to society (in a democratic sense) and that the Government is only one of numerous stakeholder groups: "it's my duty to ensure that in an ethical sense we're accountable to all the stakeholders ... so that when we reduce reliance on government and increase autonomy, we are of course doing it as a responsible public institution". However managers in this institution were frustrated at a lack of clarity about government intention: "It's operating in a policy vacuum. There is no clear sense of what the system is doing. We don't know if we're going to be highly regulated, centrally planned or totally deregulated and privatised".

In the case study university in **England**, there were very different reactions to the accountability mechanisms for teaching (conducted by the QAA) and research (conducted by HEFCE), although one respondent criticised both for their "reductionist ideology aimed at reducing things to a single dimension for the market". Generally, respondents reported dissatisfaction with the QAA. One respondent was of the view that "nobody speaks highly of it [the QAA] and in fact they abhor it but we had to do it or we would have OFSTED" (the Office of Standards in Education - OFSTED - uses a highly intrusive inspectorial system of accountability in the schooling sector). Another respondent pointed to the 'game playing' associated with teaching quality assessments, which are not evident in research assessments:

Once you know what the game is. ... the universities that started painting their departments in the order in which they were about to be assessed, and buying books. Basically driving their spending and resourcing on the basis of where the next teaching quality assessment was going to hit. But for a university where the prime effort is in research, as is ours, it becomes rather more difficult [to play the game].

Yet another respondent vigorously maintained that teaching quality assessments conducted by HEFCE and then QAA were destroying the quality of teaching, but also acknowledged that at least these assessments had raised the profile of teaching in traditional research universities:

Teaching quality assessments are actually eating the intellectual heart out of teaching and reducing it to technical performance which is measured by a purely technical measure. So when ministers say 'how can we incentivise

teaching?' we feel like saying 'well if you hadn't eaten the heart out to start with, you wouldn't be needing to incentivise it'. ... Even though it [teaching quality assessment] is a centralising, oppressing and constraining force, it puts something on the agenda to be argued about. There is no doubt that people do actually have more arguments and discussion about teaching than even 10 years ago.

By contrast, respondents were more satisfied with the Research Assessment Exercise. The general sentiment was that it was well established, well received, and cost effective, and therefore should be left alone. There was, however, acknowledgement by several respondents that elite universities (such as their own) have a vested interest in maintaining the Research Assessment Exercise as they were the winners in this system and any new system might involve spreading the finite research dollars over a wider range of universities, especially the former polytechnics: "The view that the RAE is going well, although prominent amongst the institutions that are doing well out of it, is only held in a minority of institutions".

Managerial accountability and an increased sense of bureaucracy were being experienced by respondents in the English university. One respondent lamented that the rise in bureaucratic controls had caused a loss of trust in professional standards and a general loss of good will in the sector. Concerns were particularly expressed about the intrusiveness of the QAA when for example "subject reviewers will be able to come and sit in a departmental meeting and evaluate what the department is doing. My advice to departments would be to separate *that* departmental meeting from those when you want to do real business". This scenario of 'staged' departmental meetings provides strong evidence of what Ball (2000) refers to as 'fabrication' encouraged by the prevailing culture of performativity.

Frequent references were also made to the increasingly competitive climate, consistent with a market ideology. There was lots of talk about 'positioning the institution'. Competition has led to concerns about protection of 'commercial-in-confidence' information: "we're very conscious about who we collaborate with, on what, what we give away in that process, and commercial sensitivity. The Vice-Chancellor has a very keen sense of what other competitive institutions are allowed to see and I would say he is very very protective of the institution". As well as screening what outsiders see, the fact that performance data was no longer passed around within the university between departments was also noted by one respondent, and he commented: "I very much regret the passing of collective support across the sector".

International operations provided their own particular form of tensions between managerial and market accountabilities:

In the rush to get students there has been grade slippage of all kinds. ... You're talking somebody spending over 40 000 pounds. It's huge. We can't let them fail. ... You're dependent on that income stream and people get upset when there's failure. It's seen as bad PR. There are all kinds of things that push in the direction of poor quality control, and there are those who stand up and resist and there are those who don't.

Accountability pressures (in particular a confluence of managerial and market forms) were being felt at all levels within the institution, especially by deans, as one member of the central university administration explained: "deans have a precarious institutional position" and from a Dean: "It is life and death for me". The sense of surveillance was remarkable, and it was even difficult to convince respondents to be interviewed in this climate of attenuated accountability.

In **comparing the case study universities in Australia and England**, both managerial and market accountability mechanisms had penetrated both, and there were negative reactions to increasing government interventions. In both countries there were sharp distinctions between policy intentions of embedding a cultural acceptance of accountability to governments on the one hand, and the strategies of resistance by those in universities on the other. Forms of resistance to externally-imposed accountability varied from more active gatekeeping and even rejection of government intrusion in the Australian university, to more 'playing the game' or even compliance in the English university. The market ideology was apparently stronger in the English university with a greater degree of competitive pressure and concerns about commercial confidentiality working against collaboration.

The senior managers in the Australian university were very knowledgeable about details of accountability mechanisms in the UK, but the reverse was not true. Without exception the Australian respondents believed that teaching quality mechanisms in the UK were heavy-handed compared to Australia's 'lighter touch'. However, there was a great deal of respect and support for the RAE, as one respondent expressed it: "their research assessment exercise is undoubtedly more intellectually respectable, more robust and a better quality assurance procedure than anything we have in this country". One respondent noted the extent to which the English accountability mechanisms in both teaching and research gave the administrations of English universities an impetus for action, in the form of external levers to drive internal changes. One Australian respondent rejected English accountability mechanisms in both teaching and research: "the UK obviously set them up before us and they're still probably ahead of us in this nasty process, meaning that their conditions are even worse probably than ours".

Before moving to the concluding discussion, it must be emphasised that although we began to explore some localised reactions to national accountability policies, we have no intention of extrapolating findings from one institution in each country to universities across these sectors. The different history, geography, culture and politics of individual institutions will certainly impact on the way national policies play out, but some of the issues raised by respondents in these two particular universities may warrant further examination in other contexts.

Concluding discussion

By way of drawing our modest analysis to a tentative conclusion and relating back to the 'bigger picture' of accountability policies in higher education, within the context of globalisation, three themes are highlighted: the complexity of changing power relationships; managed markets; and convergences and divergences. All three themes contain inherent tensions pulling and pushing on evolving accountability policies in higher education in Australia and England, and possibly in other countries as well. We draw to a close with a brief look at 'where to from here?'

Complexity of changing power relationships

Changes in national level accountability policy objectives, discourses, structures and processes, as well as subsequent changes in institutional practices, in both Australian and English higher education identified in this paper are all about changing power relationships. In gross terms, governments have wrestled greater power and control over universities 'in the national interest' through a series of centrally mandated accountability policies between the 1980s and 2000s, using funding and status levers as drivers. However, there has not been a simple transference of power from universities to governments; it has been a complex and contested phenomenon. The complexity has several dimensions, creating numerous tensions along the way. First, complexity comes from the fact that 'new'

universities (post-1988 in Australia and post-1992 in England) have always been under tighter central government control than traditional universities so the power shifts have not been even across the higher education sectors of these countries. Second, the complexity also comes from competing policy discourses of regulation on the one hand and deregulation on the other. In a strong regulatory framework, one would expect managerial forms of accountability to increase, but in a deregulatory framework market accountability should prevail. Both have been clearly evident in the accountability policy discourses and practices, with the external stakeholder groups of governments and consumers (especially students) featuring strongly, but these different groups at times place conflicting demands on universities.

A third dimension of the complexity arises with the involvement of some academics in establishing and administering accountability mechanisms, so that external stakeholders have not entirely monopolised the structures and processes. Although these academics have been coopted into government-initiated discourses, structures and processes largely in subservient positions, some academics would maintain that their involvement has afforded a degree of sector protection against an even greater threat to traditional academic values than if bureaucrats were left to move around the higher education institutions and administer the various accountability mechanisms. Thus, academics participating in peer review mechanisms provide some evidence of remnants of professional accountability, in a climate of increasing managerial and market accountability. Finally, the complexity of accountability relationships is further exacerbated because there has been a contestation of potentially hegemonic managerial and market accountability in the academic heartland. Contestation may take the more active form of overt resistance, or the more passive forms of gatekeeping and 'playing the game'. There has been a resistance to 'letting go' of the more traditional notions of professional and democratic accountability within universities.

The 'bigger picture' effect of objectives/discourses and structures/processes for bringing universities to account in both countries has been to deliver more power to the government. In Australia it is ministers who are increasingly identified as omnipotent (a phenomenon referred to as 'ministerialisation'), and in England it is HEFCE. These groups are becoming increasingly proactive in setting education policy agendas. By contrast, sector representation in the accountability structures and processes has declined. Groups representing universities, such as the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (England), have largely been left to react to initiatives mandated by central governments. Although academics have been coopted into the policy process, arguably it has been more to facilitate implementation than to steer policy. Further, it is highly questionable whether students, who have featured strongly in the policy discourses as customers in the marketplace, have been empowered in the new accountability arrangements. As one English respondent put it: "students have no weight whatsoever in the system. They are simply there as a rhetorical device". Gewirtz (forthcoming) maintains that although markets were introduced into education on the rationale that they would empower customers, in reality there has been a stronger emphasis on compliance through managerial control, so that the flexibility and responsiveness associated with the theory of markets have not been characteristic of new quality/accountability mechanisms.

Overall, in both countries, economically-driven notions of accountability have become entrenched as part of the ideological shift known as the New Right. The 'discipline' of the marketplace has interacted with disciplinary technologies of performance indicators and quality as promulgated by central governments, so that the locus of control has increasingly become external to universities.

Managed markets

The notion of a 'managed market' is emerging to characterise new accountability relationships in higher education in Australia and England. This concept conflates two different forms of accountability, creating a powerful hybrid version. However, there are tensions in bringing together managerial (upwards oriented) and market (outwards oriented) accountability. In its 'pure' form the New Right ideological position is opposed to any interference in the market and thus a 'settlement' is required to achieve the notion of 'government as market manager'. Salter and Tapper explain how the new style of public sector management has helped to achieve this settlement:

This is the point where the values of the New Public Management came into play as an ideological balancing force which would be used by the state to neutralise the anti-bureaucratic elements of the New Right whilst retaining the ideological advantages it offered. In time the two value positions were reconciled through the concept of the 'managed market' whereby the state regulated higher education through its use of controlled market mechanisms designed to achieve greater efficiency in the use of public resources. (Salter and Tapper 2000: 70-71)

In the hybrid notion of a 'managed market' in both Australian and English higher education to date, managerial forms of accountability remain stronger than market forms. Arguably, market accountability to paying customers, while growing, is still more in the rhetoric than reality as governments position themselves to operate on behalf of other stakeholders, thereby buffering a direct producer-consumer relationship. In particular, governments are claiming a central role in providing information to students as paying customers, to inform their market choices.

Arguably, the hybrid 'managed market' form of accountability is functioning more in the teaching arena than in research. Both students and employers are relatively easily defined as 'customers' for the products of university teaching but the 'customers' for research are somewhat more diffuse and problematic, especially in the diminishing domain of 'pure' research. In research, the market ethos of competition is becoming more pervasive but the orientation is still largely within the sector (eg peer review), rather than to external paying customers.

Financial levers are central to the operation of the 'managed market', especially in a climate of budget cutbacks. If allocation of government funds is based on performance, universities are forced to comply with government (managerial) accountability regimes as they compete for increasingly scarce resources. Further, as total funding from governments is inadequate, universities have also been forced to find private sources of income and hence they have entered the marketplace. In this marketplace, universities have been using government accountability indices, such as published performance data and quality rankings, to convince customers to purchase their services (market accountability). In this instance, market accountability serves to embed managerial accountability devices and a 'culture of performativity' penetrates more deeply into universities. However, there is a possible stumbling block emerging as many universities (especially the elites) are actively working to decrease their financial dependence on government and thus position themselves to reject managerial forms of accountability. In theory this may mean a shift towards more 'pure' market accountability as government financial levers disappear, but this still leaves the question of what universities will use as their marketing tools if they are not participating in government accountability mechanisms.

The possible exception to the current predominance of managerial over market forms of accountability, is the international operations of universities. Until now off-shore teaching and learning have not been closely scrutinised by governments and 'free' market principles have been more evident. However, as quality agencies in both countries turn their attention to regulating overseas operations, more of a 'managed market' approach is likely to emerge.

Convergences and divergences

Can we make any contribution to discussions about globalisation with its inherent convergences and divergences? Although we would certainly NOT wish to make generalised claims about globalisation on the basis of inter-national comparisons of accountability policies in Australian and English higher education, there are some issues for consideration in exploring the phenomenon of globalisation. Our findings indicate strong convergence of policy objectives and discourses around New Right or economic ideologies, but less convergence, even deliberate divergence, of particular structures and processes between Australia and England. These differences can be related to context-specific dynamics which are firmly located within the different historical, social, economic and political influences within each nation-state. As expressed in Levin's medical analogy, "although many people may be infected with a given disease, the severity can vary greatly" (1998: 139), suggesting that the uptake of potentially homogenising global agendas is not even. Arguably, England has 'suffered' a more severe case of 'accountability overload' than Australia between the early 1980s and early 2000s.

Our analysis found that policy convergences and divergences were operating in dynamic interrelationship, such that both can occur concurrently. We might hypothesise that accountability policy in higher education is influenced by globalisation, and in turn itself has an impact on globalisation, as individual nation-states *actively* engage in the global arena. However, this was only a preliminary study and we would want to further explore context-specific differences, especially in different types of universities in these countries, and then also to extend to different nation-states. Further, we would want to move beyond university manager perspectives, and into the academic heartland. Such data collection could allow for further development of theories of globalisation of education policy. We have offered only a beginning, but we argue that it is important to examine details of policy objectives/discourses and structures/processes, and their possible convergences and divergences, rather than simply being drawn along with globalisation 'talk'.

What mechanisms could account for the convergences of higher education accountability policy objectives/discourses and structures/processes between Australia and England? Using Dale's (1999) typology outlined earlier, it seems that the more traditional mechanisms of policy borrowing and learning are still the most prevalent (although 'dissemination' through supranational bodies such as the OECD is also recognisable). Despite talk of globalisation, much of the education policy exchange is still inter-national (often a web of bilateral informal exchange relationships). We would argue that the nation-state at this moment remains the essential unit of analysis, and there is active gatekeeping of global influences in the construction of national education policies - at least in the example of higher education accountability policies. This, however, is not to deny the growing importance of potentially homogenising tendencies of globalisation.

Where to from here?

Given the continuing importance of the individual nation-state in policy making (within an overarching context of globalisation), we 'take heart' in the possibility of destabilising the near-hegemonic status of economic ideologies with accompanying managerial and market forms of accountability in education. The political sphere is the arena for such action and

that is still firmly routed within individual nation-states. We would strongly agree with Gewirtz (forthcoming) that there is a need to "bring politics back into education policy debates" and to emphasise that "producers of politics ... contribute to the creation of the agenda". We need to foreground struggles between competing interest groups over key concepts such as accountability, performance indicators and quality. We would argue to broaden the narrow economic view, and that multiple accountabilities are entirely appropriate for universities (with their multiple long term goals) in a democratic society. Returning to the accountability typologies outlined in the introduction, we would wish to refocus attention on the downward and inward accountabilities (Corbett 1992) alongside the upward and outward dimensions. Further we would argue to broaden outward accountability to refocus on the notion of public service to the community as a whole rather than the fragmenting notion of individual consumers making 'informed' market choices. In higher education, the policy elite at both the system and individual institutional levels should be accountable to the academic heartland and the wider community for creating the spaces to reinvigorate professional and democratic forms of accountability.

We are not questioning the importance of accountability *per se* but we would argue that the current accountability regimes are not efficient or effective (to use economic discourses), let alone socially just. Issues of equity are especially important for non-traditional universities in 'unified' systems; non-traditional students in expanded systems; academic staff in increasingly differentiated status hierarchies within universities; and overseas students who have been subjected 'double standards' and cultural imperialism. Accountability, performance indicators and quality are not neutral technical devices, but they are value-laden and must be problematised. If not problematised, they will become the 'midwives' of globalisation (Blackmore 1999) which 'deliver' market ideologies uncritically around the globe.

In practical terms, there is a need for a better balance between externally focused 'prove' and internally focused 'improve' dimensions of accountability. We conclude with the sentiments of Roger Brown, a commentator and participant in English higher education:

To put the matter somewhat provocatively: is what we have here a necessary, serious, well conceived and well integrated means for helping and reinforcing institutions' efforts in an economical and focused way to cope with some of the undoubtedly major and complex quality issues raised by expansion, diversification of the student population, changes in the higher education curriculum and the marked and continuing decline in unit of resource, and for reporting on their perceived success in doing so? Or is what we have here essentially a political agenda designed to provide politicians, civil servants, leaderwriters, employers and others with reassurances which, because of the necessarily high degree of generality with which national instruments can be designed and applied do not actually provide those reassurances, but which through their emphasis on external quality evaluation do not promote, and may even set back, serious institutional quality assurance? In short are we in a world of substance or of rhetoric? Only time will tell. (Brown 1998: 31)

Notes

1. In this paper, policy is taken to include not only the statements of intent of the policy elite, but the subsequent institutional practices which may be significantly different from the original intent (Ball 1994, Taylor *et al* 1997).

2. Two major strategies of the New Right ideology have been 'privatisation' and 'corporatisation' of the public sector, and these have different implications for the predominant form of accountability policies. Privatisation involves the transfer of either assets or production from the government (public) sector to the non-government (private) sector (Marginson 1993). It incorporates a wide range of strategies from outright sale of previously government-owned facilities, to increasing private equity in public enterprises, to contracting out public services to private companies. Corporatisation involves the restructuring of the public sector to more closely mirror private business corporations, with a strong focus on an input, process, outcome model of production. In particular, corporatisation involves the apparently contradictory directions of centralising goal setting by a managerial elite, but the concurrent decentralising of processes to create a 'lean and mean' organisation (Bessant 1995). There is not always a clear delineation between these strategies of privatisation and corporatisation because in some cases both are occurring simultaneously within any one particular public sector domain, and there are often tensions between these two 'solutions', related to differences within the coalition of competing interests.

3. Over the period under investigation, the Commonwealth bureaucracy changed names several times from the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) to the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

4. The ARC was the only council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training created in 1988 to survive restructurings and continue into the 2000s.

5. Over the period under investigation, the department changed names several times from the Department for Education and Science (DES) to the Department for Education (DfE) to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

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