

Subscriber response to Roger Scott's article on Christopher Pyne's proposed Higher Education changes

I think it is important for your piece to emphasise that it is not intended to be an attack on The University of Queensland but rather an examination in the form of a case study of one state you know well. Queensland's problems are no different from the problems of other jurisdictions across Australia, apart from the wide dispersal of tertiary provisions across a large geographical location. The biggest problem is lack of certainty about the financial parameters affecting differential rates for courses on the one hand and student loan obligations on the other.

You say too little about the capacity of non-university higher education providers to capture a much larger market share, particularly from regional universities and former Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs). The Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector will likewise have to compete for this same market as they suffered a large decrease in real income in the past few years as a result of contestable funding arrangements which have privileged private competitors. These providers will now be empowered to offer degrees as well and receive funding on the same basis as public providers. TAFE colleges in Brisbane have already moved away from traditional trades and apprenticeships as they have been rebranded as institutes of technology.

While international students will continue to provide a lifeline to those institutions located in the sort of urban environment which such students favour, those based outside Brisbane will have trouble under deregulation. Bond University will be laughing all the way to the bank but so will hundreds of private 'registered training authorities' who will now get access to government money to offer degrees. It is pretty clear that regional students will be the losers.

You could also have provided more detail on the option of greater systemic co-operation which would allow state governments to work with funding authorities to maximise the benefits of existing infrastructure and direct efforts towards areas of under-participation. The current system has created segmentation into groups of institutions and leave open a government strategy of divide and conquer. We probably have too many universities and TAFEs in Australia but throwing most of them to the wolves seems to be an extreme solution.