

Australian higher education reform: 75 years in 3½ minutes

Australian higher education is optimistic. Sunlight, rainbows, unicorns, and it's all thanks to the O'Kane Accord and its vision for a possible future. It calls for bold, system wide reform, effective immediately. Complacency will not be tolerated. Let's take a trip back in time through the politics of Australian higher education.

Our brotherhood of learning has celebrated the Allies victory. And now we turn our thoughts toward peace and problems of the common moment. Our universities are in crisis, yet there is an alarming degree of public apathy regarding our affairs.

Our nation needs educated people. Every boy and girl with the necessary brain power must drink of the fountain of knowledge. Our universities are not equipped to discharge such a heavy responsibility.

Volume One - 244 pages plus corrigenda. Volume Two - 176 pages plus corrigenda. Volume Three with Appendices is forthcoming.

Fees will be abolished at Australian universities, technical colleges and colleges of advanced education. It's time.

Resource challenges are considerable, which has led to a decline in educational standards. Buildings and equipment are subpar. University management and accountability needs to be improved.

Taxpayers who do not benefit at all from higher education are burdened. Graduates, students, employers - the direct recipients contribute almost nothing. We need something fairer.

We have initiated a unified national system. We thank universities for their cooperation. We reassert our commitment to the highest quality. We reject any assertions to the contrary.

We have been free spirits, unconstrained in imagining the future. No country has yet achieved universal access to postsecondary education. Australia could well be the first.

Higher education is at a crossroads. Standing still is not an option. To the empires of the minds, we owe it to the future to earnestly consider the options before us.

We share the same vision. An outstanding, internationally competitive tertiary education system that meets Australia's future needs. We must act now. We're losing ground. This calls for an education revolution.

Universities can no longer write their own cheques. The system must be efficient, effective, accountable, high quality and, above all, fair.

We are incentivising students to make job relevant choices. Everything is getting better.

Perhaps the O'Kane accord is the unicorn we need to make the poisoned waters of Australian higher education reform potable. Let's hope we find that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.