



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Achieving International Excellence

Life-long Learning in Australia: setting parameters for global comparisons

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Common understanding

In Australia two ideas underpin the use of the term

- 1) An attitude: constant education throughout one's life
- 2) A structure: a mixture of formal and informal modes of learning



Common Terms

- *Mature Age student*: 21 (or 24) years +
- *Second Chance*: Entering university without conventional high-school completion/grades needed for university entry
- *Life Long / Continuous Learners*: Broadly encompassing all students who are not school leavers, returning to study or taking advanced degrees



Australia's universities have a greater mix of students than in many countries.

In comparison to other countries, a smaller proportion of higher-education students commence directly from school. There is also a greater proportion of mature-aged students, more students studying part-time and more students studying via distance education programmes (Nelson 2002: 5).



Australia's 'Group of Eight' Leading Universities





Go8 goals

“The Group of Eight (Go8) universities have a distinctive role to play in ensuring Australia’s higher education system meets the broad goals and needs of our community and provides opportunities for all those with academic potential”.



There should be no systemic barriers to participation. There should be provision for the varying needs of students from different backgrounds. Special intervention measures may be needed to encourage participation from groups that are under-represented in certain areas, or to sustain their success, including 'second chance' [non-matriculated, return to study and/or older students] opportunities and dedicated support (Nelson 2002: 2).



Common arguments for LLL

- Social Justice
- Development of human capital



History

- Rank order student selection for university entry introduced in early 1960s
- Pragmatism and idealism in AEP (alternative entry program) concept
- Specific programs of mature age entry started in the mid-1970s – e.g. ‘Open Foundation Program’ in Newcastle University in 1974



Diverse Practice

Great deal of diversity in the ways in which the ideals of life-long learning are practiced by universities:

- Special university program to prepare students for university entry (e.g. OFP)
- In collaboration with TAFE colleges
- Provisional admission to first-year units, with full admission dependent on results



UWA Case-Study

- VC's commitment to 'second chance' students
- UWA's AEP for mature age students (including those without matriculation) started in 2008
- About 50 students with diverse educational backgrounds participated



UWA: continued

- Provisional admission under which students were required to pass the equivalent of one semester of full-time study
- Review at the end of year showed these students performance was similar to the 'normal' body of UWA students
- 2009 – 90 enrolments



Equity vs Quality

- Selection process for AEPs
- Learning vs accrediting as key university function
- Several studies since the 1980s suggest that the long-term unemployed rarely participate in AEPs



New Policy Emphasis

Government's key targets by 2020:

- a) Australia's economic competitiveness requires that 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds have at least a bachelor-level qualification
- b) 20 per cent of undergraduate enrolments in higher education should be students from low socio-economic backgrounds



Solutions?

- Better connections between layers of tertiary education – TAFE to University continuum
- Philosophical shift: assessing cultural and social value for mature age learners rather than course results achieved