Submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee—Inquiry into the Provisions of the University of Tasmania Act 1992

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Table of contents:

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1. Introduction –this inquiry into the provisions of the University of Tasmania Act 1992 in context of the current state of the Australian University

The primary concern of this Inquiry should be whether the University Tasmania Act 1992 is adequate to the academic nature or **purpose** of the University. The question of purpose for the Australian university has been neglected for a long time and this Inquiry offers an important opportunity to revisit it.

This inquiry needs to be set in the historical context of the transformation of the Australian University in the wake of the Dawkins 'reforms' of 1990. It was Minister Dawkins who repositioned the Australian university as first and foremost a business where its nature as an academic institution took second priority.

Before John Dawkins became Minister of Employment, Education and Training in 1987, as Minister of Finance he was responsible for 'public sector reform'. In this role he applied the methods of New Public Management ('managerialism') to the Australian Public Service: until this point the APS was thought of as public administration with its own distinctive professional ethics. Now public administration was replaced by management understood as a context indifferent set of methods and techniques. The distinctive role of 'the public official' was replaced by that of the generic manager. In fact, however, private sector management was assumed to be the norm and was now permitted to lead the way in relation to the public sector.

Private sector management is oriented to the maximisation of value (monetised in the forms of price, unit costs, and profit). Its core orientation is to productivity growth. It should be obvious that service to the needs of the public is conceptually other than service to productivity growth. Yet the neoliberal magic trick is to make it seem that productivity growth is not just the same as service to the public interest but its basis. It is this fundamental

conceptual or category error that drives the fateful trajectory of the Australian University, the erosion of its academic character in favour of turning it into a productivity-oriented business.

There is no greater threat to constitutional democracy, to the civil republican tradition of the state and the rule of law, than this displacement of service to the public by the focus on productivity growth. Productivity growth is an economic conception that is tied to the model of the competitive market economy. It simply cannot accommodate the political ideas of citizenship, voice (participation in the decisions that govern our lives), civil society, and, not least, a cooperative-civil mode of peaceful coexistence that underwrites governmental capacity to creatively and effectively address collective challenges.

The one-eyed subjugation of all other values to the single value orientation of productivity growth explains the progressive degradation of the quality of Australian government and the public sector since the end of the 1980s. It also explains the otherwise puzzling priority given to the Australian Productivity Commission in providing policy advice to government.

The hallmarks of private sector management are the following: (a) it is indifferent to any particular content of production: instead the focus is on productivity growth and maximisation of monetised value, and if these should be better realised in switching to a different product, then the switch is made; (b) unlike a traditional business, then, it has no loyalty to any particular product associated with the history of this business as this has been shaped by both relationships and place; (c) thus, there can be no reference to purpose for purpose is inherently specific, and when activity is oriented to purpose, every aspect of that activity has to be shaped by that purpose.

Minister Dawkins's evangelical attachment to the methods of New Public Management was somewhat peculiar but it belonged to the general takeover of Australian government and the public sector from the 1980s onward by a conception of value (and methods of achieving it) that originate in the late 20th and 21st century private sector and its organisational form, the private corporation. Neoliberal ('economic rationalist') philosophy offered the paradigm within which the conceptual extension of the idea of a competitive market economy to public phenomena seemed to make sense.

When John Dawkins extended the neoliberal principles of NPM to Australian higher education, this required it to be led and governed as a business. This meant the following:

- If the institution was to operate as a business enterprise there could be only one model, that of the corporation. In this context the corporation was called a university. The historically given diversity of universities, colleges of advanced education, and institutes of technology was no longer needed. There could be just one type of higher education organisation: the university.
- Scale (scaling up) is valued, the assumption being that this promotes productive efficiency (hence the amalgamations of erstwhile CAEs and Institutes of Technology into large multi-campus universities).
- Competition is understood to be the driver of improvements in productivity including technological change (hence the new 'national system' established in 1990 was designed to fit the principles of competition policy);
- Commercialisation is viewed as the real test of the value of the product on the assumption that only if the product can command a market price does it have value (Dawkins was the Minister who established 'education as an export industry, allowing

educational providers to recruit fee-paying overseas students', MacIntyre et. al. 2017, 9; since that time the same logic has been extended to university research);

- The leadership and government of the university is no longer academic in nature but business-oriented. It is transformed into corporate leadership and management (the executive group of the university began to be paid according to private sector corporate expectations, and the idea of the university as a self-governing academic community was replaced by the idea of a managed corporate enterprise);
- Employment contract law, which follows the private law principle of freedom of contract, now structures the university as a hierarchical relationship between the university as the employer and its employees.
- Thus, the idea of the university as an academic community that is structured by its service to the purpose of professional academic life is definitively displaced. The organisation now becomes just a series of contractual relationships.
- In losing its distinctive purpose, like any other work, academic work is subject to short-term productivity measurement and performance management;
- This means the reduction of academic work to a series of technical and functional tasks.
- The university as a distinctive community of academics is no longer an integral whole but can be disaggregated, and the university can do what other corporations do: make a distinction between core 'in house' functions and contract out the others.

I am suggesting, then, the primary concern of this Inquiry should be whether the University Tasmania Act 1992 is adequate to the academic nature or purpose of the University. Careful examination must be made of the Act concerning the way in which this University like other universities in Australia have been subjected increasingly to economic rather than academic modes of thinking and governance.

2. The University of Tasmania Act and its language of functions—a function is not the same thing as a purpose

The University of Tasmania Act uses the language of functions with reference to specifying the identity of the university. Such language does not appear in the 1889 Act, and even if it had, the understanding of 'function' prior to 1992 was rather different and would have had no negative implications for the University understood as an academic institution subject to academic modes of governance (at the level of the part, the department; and at the level of the whole, the university).

Now, however, in context of managerialist governance and the expectation that the university operate according to business criteria, the language of functions is not adequate to securing the distinctive identity of the university as an academic entity. Managerialism can harness any function just as it can also break down and disaggregate a set of functions. The only way the language of functions can serve the academic identity of the university is that it be framed by and answerable to the language of purpose.

The University of Tasmania Act declares that: *the University has the following functions*:

> *(a) to advance, transmit and preserve knowledge and learning;*
> *(b) to encourage and undertake research;*
> *(c) to promote and sustain teaching and research to international standards of excellence;*

(d) to encourage and provide opportunities for students and staff to develop and apply their knowledge and skills;
(e) to provide educational and research facilities appropriate to its other functions;
(f) to promote access to higher education having regard to the principles of merit and equity;
(fa) to foster or promote the commercialisation of any intellectual property;
(g) to engage in activities which promote the social, cultural and economic welfare of the community, and to make available for those purposes the resources of the university.

This section of the Act is its core. Everything else in the Act should either directly follow from or be congruent with it.

The language of 'functions' belies what should be really at stake in regard to how the University of Tasmania is legislatively constituted, namely, the *purpose* of the University.

The last two clauses (fa, g) are not congruent with the previous clauses all of which have something to do with 'knowledge'. Clause (g) could be so consonant if it specified that the University has an obligation to share its *knowledge* activities with the community or publics that it serves.

Clause (fa), in my view, cannot be made so consonant because it is the nature of knowledge to be universal in its orientation and, thus, to belong to the commons. Knowledge cannot be privately appropriated without violating its nature as open, publicly transparent, publicly shareable, inquiry. Knowledge can have no purpose extrinsic to itself because this would be to subject knowledge to something other than itself: instrumental and/or commercial value, or in the case of despotism, the exercise of power.

Knowledge is something other than information. As the basis of expertise, knowledge has to involve the capacity to reflect on the value orientation of such expertise. This is why knowledge, a noun, is not adequate except as it is situated within processes of thinking, a verb.

Hannah Arendt, a famous political philosopher of the 20th century, is known for her insistence on thinking as a verb, as an activity that may call into question established ways of knowing and doing. When thinking is operative, we have to 'stop and think', to momentarily disengage from the practical-worldly demands of doing and give ourselves over to the contemplative activity of thinking (which includes imagining, speculating, reflecting, searching for meaning).

This is why thinking is so deeply connected to our capacities for creativity, wisdom, judgment, and ethical conduct. Arendt has no doubt that the modern powers of science and technology are extraordinary but, in and of themselves, they do not enhance the quality of life, be this human or planetary in scope.

For the quality of life to be enhanced in the first place it has to be cherished, and to be cherished, it has to be attended to, and to be attended to, it has to be listened to. This is where for Arendt (and her philosopher mentor, Martin Heidegger) thinking begins.

Each profession has a distinctive identity that follows upon it being designed to serve a specific aspect of the integrity of the human being and its world. It is this identity that gives the profession its purpose, which in turn shapes every aspect of professional work. Thus, for example, if the various health professions are to serve the purpose of enabling human health they have to reflect on what health means and how this meaning should inform the purpose of their work.

I have proposed that the professions are to be regarded as 'stewards of distinctive human goods. (Yeatman 2018, 201).' In good professional work there is an extraordinary and dynamic integration of purpose, ethics, experience, judgment, and expertise which is why, among other things, young professionals have to be taught and mentored by senior, experienced professionals.

Practice of a professional vocation requires the support and guidance of a professional community of practice. It is for this reason that professional autonomy is central to the conditions of possibility of professionalism. Such autonomy is conditional on the professions doing what it is they are designed to do: serve a distinctive human or more than human good in accord with historically appropriate standards of ethical conduct, science, and public interest.

3. Academic professionalism and its distinctive purpose

The core purpose of academic professionalism is thinking—specifically, the integration of knowledge understood as cognition (logically reasoned and evidence-based forms of knowing which are expressed as a plurality of disciplines of cognition) and knowledge understood as understanding, or the search for meaning (Arendt 1977).

As the university has been taken over by the productivity paradigm its distinctive academic purpose has been displaced by the re-conception of academic work in terms of productive output and the harnessing of academic work and academics to the instrumental-functionalist end of maximising output.

Specifically, the new managerialist leadership of the university has deliberately severed cognition and understanding. The emphasis has shifted to cognition and how it can be translated into marketable output.

Productivity-oriented conduct falls into the category of what Hannah Arendt called 'relentless activity' that comes about when we allow ourselves to be swallowed up by the organisational imperatives of productivity growth. Here is the statement of Arendt's I have in mind:

> [A]ny relentless activity allows responsibility to evaporate. There's an English idiom, "Stop and think." Nobody can think unless they stop. If you force someone into remorseless activity, or they allow themselves to be forced into it, it'll always be the same story… You'll always find that an awareness of responsibility can't develop. It can only develop in the moment when the person reflects—not on himself, but on what he's doing (Arendt 2013, 59-60).

In the current form of the university, where the nexus between cognition and understanding has been broken, all university work has been intensified, hurried up, and subject to short-term performance measurement. Even if some have the inclination and the time to stop and think, this is no longer invited or welcomed at the organisational level. The destruction of the

organisational container of the academic discipline—the department—as the ground-level unit of university management and government is emblematic of there being no avenue for academics to stop and think on behalf of how their institution carries out academically purposive work.

It is obvious that 'stop and think' cannot be reconciled with the imperatives of productivity growth with their built-in standards, measurements and rules. Traditionally it is precisely 'stop and think' that the university has stood for—more particularly, for an education in the distinctive traditions of human 'stopping and thinking' in how they enable reflection on the challenges of being human. The purpose of the university is to provide a safe place that nurtures and informs a trained capacity to stop and think.

The university is the home of the modern professions which are tied directly to training, education and research in their mother disciplines within the university. This ensures that the capacity to integrate the practices of understanding and expert knowledge is educated. The engineer, for example, is expected to think about her duty to build bridges that are safe and that enhance the quality of the built environment and she is expected to seek out how the history of engineering may inform her capacity to do this.

'Stop and think' is an acquired capacity because it inherently challenges all our complacent and habitual ways of going about things. All genuine reflection disturbs us by opening a vista of what we do not know or understand. It invites humility and it invites the development of that capacity to listen, to wait until things disclose what they seem to require of us. It leads us to question conventional and fashionable norms and to more deeply inquire into values.

'Stop and think' requires of the university that it be a safe relational environment for the practice of these critical reflective skills informed as they must be by sustained engagement with the many traditions of human thought and inquiry. It must be a reliable and continuing relational environment that facilitates the courage in taking the risk to stop and think, and that in rigorous fashion opens up the rich human heritage of knowledge to those who are engaged with a particular knowledge discipline or set of disciplines. Not only must the more experienced and senior academics mentor those who are starting out, but those who teach must hold the space for the academic neophytes, the undergraduates, who until this point in their development have not been invited and expected to stop and think in a sustained and informed way.

If the university is the home of the professions, it has to have a beating heart that enables it to be so. This is 'the liberal arts', all the disciplines in the Humanities, Social and Natural Sciences that are dedicated to different kinds of exploration of the relationship between knowledge and understanding. Hence the phrase that is associated with what is distinctive about university education: in it, one is trained to think.

4. Academic professionalism cannot be reconciled with managerialism

Managerialism is not and cannot be purposive. It is functionalist in character—the orientation to productivity means that the value of everything and anything is subjugated to the productivity calculus.[1]

[1] Here is how the Australian Productivity Commission explains 'What is Productivity?': 'Productivity is a measure of the rate at which output of goods and services are produced per unit of input (labour, capital, raw materials, etc.). It is calculated as the ratio of the quantity of output produced to some measure of the quantity

Managerialism seems to be a form of professionalism as evidenced in the ubiquitous MBA and the higher educated profile of its practitioners, but, in fact, managerialism is an anti-professionalism. Managerialism represents the corruption of professionalism, its transformation into an abstract force, what Heidegger (using the language of Friedrich Nietzsche) called the will to power. This is expressed in the hubris and arrogance of the managerialist class. Theirs is an 'elite generalism' (Freidson cit.Yeatman 2018, 211). Because they represent the abstract universals of performance and productivity, they transcend and subsume all that that the specific professions do by way of concrete purposive work. The managerialist, thus, is the uber-professional. They do not have to listen to those whose professionalism is integrally tied up with a concrete, purposive responsiveness to need (human or more than human). Indeed, their focus on productivity requires them *not* to listen to the professionals they manage and to discount their resistance to the superimposition of a productivity matrix on professional work.

With managerialism, a hyper functionalism takes over and reduces the professions to so many iterations of technical expertise that can be instrumentally harnessed on behalf of 'the functions' of the enterprise, in this case, the university. There is no constraint on managerialism other than that associated with lawful conduct.

All professionals now, including university academics, find that their organisational environments make it both difficult and dangerous to practice 'stop and think'. They are no longer permitted to be stewards of their particular professional discipline nor to advocate for the area of need it serves.

Eliot Friedson (cit Yeatman 2018, 210) suggests that we may be in process of losing the role of the professions in modern life:

> The worst and not unlikely possibility is that professionals will be slowly transformed into especially privileged technical workers. This is what is implied by Brint's … analysis of the changes that have been taking place in the political positions of American professions. He believes that professionals, once considered trustees of socially important knowledge designed to contribute to the public good and servants of values transcending the immediate and practical, are on a course of changing into neutral technical experts.

The neoliberal-managerialist take-over of modern society is not a given. As we begin to understand how it has ravaged the integrity of not just the biosphere but human society itself, we can recover our ability to 'stop and think', and in so doing, reclaim both the professions and their home: the university.

5. The importance of what the University of Tasmania Act contains

Like other public institutions, a university, in this case the University of Tasmania, is legislatively constituted so that it is governed and organised to be the kind of public phenomenon that it is. I have said that the language of functions is evasive and inadequate

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of inputs used.' It goes onto say: 'Many factors can affect productivity growth. These include technological improvements, economies of scale and scope, workforce skills, management practices, changes in other inputs (such as capital). Competitive pressures and the stage of the business cycle.'

with respect to what it is the University Act should do in this regard. Instead, it has to be the language of purpose.

6. Conclusion

My recommendation is that the University Act be changed so that it substitutes the language of purpose for that of function(s). The distinctive purpose of the University needs to be appropriately specified, and this should be done as the next stage of this Inquiry in a process of genuine consultation with the academic community of Tasmania, and, as appropriate, beyond.

7. My academic experience and standing

I am now 73 going on 74. I served in the Australian university system from 1977 to 2018 with two periods outside Australia (University of Waikato 1991-3; University of Alberta 2003-8). I have had professorial positions since 1991 when I was appointed as the first chair of Women's Studies in New Zealand. I list these in an appendix below. I had the good fortune to participate in a nation-building phase of the Australian university from 1977 until 1996. This evoked in me an ethic of dedication to academic professional life that still underwrites what I understand to be its core values. My father was a very good general practitioner and physician whose values and skills were greatly elaborated by his experience as a doctor in the Australian army in the Second World War; my mother was a social worker. You could say professional ethics and an ethic of professional service is deeply ingrained in my being. I have undertaken major public policy evaluations (the last of which was the Review of the First Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement) and I have had the honour of working with fine and committed public servants who have their own distinctive professional ethics and sense of vocation. These evaluations took me into the professional arenas of home and community care, disability care, disability employment services, income support services, and public schools. I have witnessed first-hand the intrinsic motivation of all the different kinds of professionals in these areas. Across all these experiences of professional life I can attest to one core truth: the heart of good professional work and conduct is relational – it resides in attendance to and on the needs of whomever or whatever requires such service. Such attendance to and on need cannot be understood in terms of a productivity matrix: these are entirely different rationalities as I explain in my book *Individualization and the Delivery of Welfare Services* (Yeatman 2009).

Australia is destroying its professions and the institutional autonomy they need to practice their vocations.

This is a national tragedy, not peculiar to Australia but it is only as citizens of Australia that we can address this tragedy.

To do this we have to take such opportunities as avail when the crisis of the professions breaks into the light of day in a particular sector or institution—as here it does in this review.

Before I conclude let me say something further of my personal relationship to this review. I am an adjunct professor in Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania. I associate with a number of people who are or have been academic employees of this University. Like all other active or retired Australian academics who love both our vocation and the Australian University, we share stories of what is happening in this sector. The stories I have heard

about UTAS belong to the worst I have heard, and I have been filled with deep sadness that the only university in this small state should have become so degraded.

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Appendix

Anna Yeatman—professorial appointments:

Adjunct Professor, Social Sciences, University of Tasmania, 2019-

Emeritus Professor, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, Western Sydney University, 2019-

Professor, Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, 2017 - 2019

Professorial Research Fellow, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, 2012-2017

Professor and Foundation Director, Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy, University of Western Sydney, 2008-2011—promoted to Level E step 2, 29 March 2011

Canada Research Chair (Tier I) in Political Science, University of Alberta, 2003-2008

Professor of Sociology, Macquarie University, 1993-2003

Foundation Professor of Women's Studies, University of Waikato, 1991-1993.