

Editorial

CHANGING EDUCATIONAL PATTERNS

COMMERCIALISATION of higher education is fast becoming an issue of an ethical nature. Following financial constraints and the realisation that students are an investment for the future, even and especially students from abroad, universities are expanding beyond national horizons. Two trends are apparent, establishing dependencies and links abroad and virtual universities. In addition more sophisticated efforts are being made by universities in technology transfer—an area of activity which in bygone days never really got beyond its initial non-profitable phases.

With the establishment of overseas-dependent institutions, education authorities in the ‘colonised’ countries are waking up to re-examine quality issues. A case in point is that of the University of Derby from the United Kingdom which is represented in Israel by a local college. The Israel education authorities are dragging their feet when it comes to approval of the Derby dependency as a qualified higher education institution. In addition to the United Kingdom further examples proliferate in overseas connections of Australian and USA Institutions.

American universities establish fully fledged American tuition in foreign countries, undertaken by their own faculties. This entails a US degree without residency in the USA. Such attempts may undermine local ideas of quality assurance and accreditation. The USA has an accreditation board for engineering and technology (ABET) which assures a quality standard for those institutions which seek to be approved. Its work is mainly in the USA but it is expanding accreditation activities to Asia, South America and the Middle East. While the accreditation requirements of ABET are formidable, foreign countries with other cultures may want other and additional criteria to work for them. The real thrust for English language institutions from the USA, United Kingdom and Australia will come when expansion of their activities is taking place in non-English speaking countries, with Israel, and its high quality indigenous education, as a marginal case (as far as language is concerned). In Germany, where standards are self-generating and there is still no established method of quality assurance, there are moves to set up regional accreditation boards. Whether they can rival ABET is yet to be determined.

Further news is the situation of accreditation of virtual universities. Do we need new assessment systems for these distance-learning establishments? Will consortia of elite universities offering distance learning compete with not-so-elite universities in other countries? Are we becoming a global village of higher education offered by a few top establishments? Probably not; as all reports show, the campus experience is irreplaceable. But shifts in education patterns are appearing on the horizon.

Michael S. Wald