



WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITIES?

THE MECHANISMS UNDERPINNING TRADITIONAL TERTIARY EDUCATION ARE CRUMBLING. SO WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF LEARNING TO LOOK LIKE?

WORDS JOHN MASON

Although university pathways are often recommended for continuing students, advances in technology and the need for specialist training and continuing professional development (CPD) have opened up a new market for learners. Online and distance learning – once the poor cousin of face-to-face university lectures – is now a vital and disruptive force in the education sector.

Old world mechanisms such as passive lecture delivery are giving way to active learning strategies, including practical tasks and real-world application. In 2020, Finland's secondary school system will transition from a core curriculum to student-led investigations using a holistic approach. These investigations will focus on preparing students for real world tasks.

The focus on directed, experiential learning encourages students to explore the connections between theory, utility and subject-adjacent fields. And yet, many universities are leaning away from such innovative practice, turning their focus more toward self-preservation and away from their core purpose: furthering learning.

SEAMLESS, BLENDED LEARNING

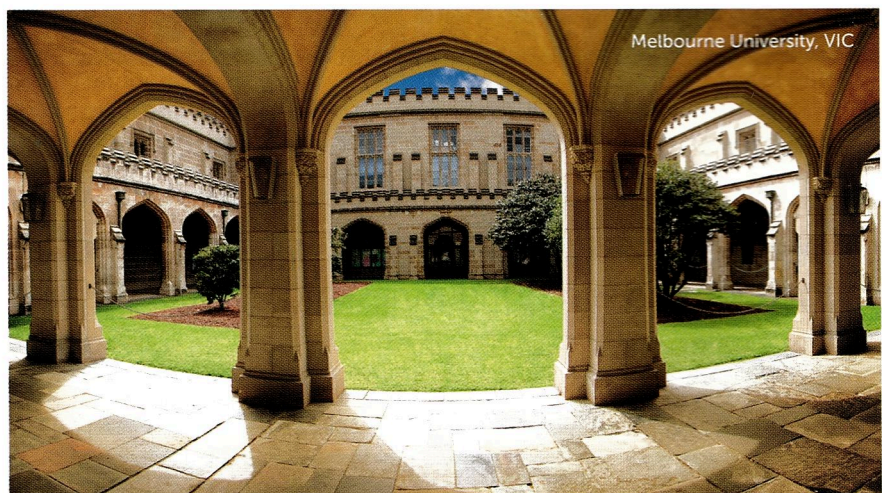
Innovation never sleeps. Today, our knowledge base changes so rapidly

that what you learn in your first year of university course may be outdated and irrelevant by the time you reach third year. Regular upskilling and CPD across a variety of fields is important to remaining relevant in an ever-evolving job market. In Australia, teachers are required to undertake a set number of professional development hours. Many engage with this requirement through specialist providers outside the university system.

Population changes and economic needs also drive changes in the labour market – according to the Australian Department of Jobs and Small Business, there was a 35.9 percent

increase in Animal Attendants and Trainers from 2011 to 2016. Thirty percent of these workers hold no post-secondary qualification. Similarly, data shows a 21.6 percent increase in Education Aides over the same period. Thirty percent of these workers also hold no post-secondary qualification.

What does no post-secondary qualification mean? In this context, a post-secondary qualification is any study program undertaken within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). These include Certificates I-IV, Diplomas, Bachelor Degrees, and more. CPD courses outside the AQF





Sydney University, NSW

aren't counted; many self-regulated industries, such as counselling, have many highly regarded practitioners who have trained via non-traditional pathways. (Note that counselling shows a 29 percent increase in workers over 2011 to 2016, 13 percent of whom hold no post-secondary qualification.)

Recognition of non-traditional and experiential learning is also growing more commonplace in the European Union. In 2012, the Council of the European Union released a report stating: *The validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important*

role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning.

The Council also recommended the implementation of a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIFL) for Member States. As the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) writes: *The importance to Europe of skilled and knowledgeable citizens extends beyond formal education to learning acquired in non-formal or informal ways. Citizens must be able to demonstrate what they have learned to use this learning in their career and for further education and training.*

With the advent of globalisation and increasing global access to an educational free market, such recognition is increasingly important for nations all over the world.

In the UK, a body called the Awards for Training and Higher Education (ATHE) has established new pathways for undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications earned via studies at multiple universities or colleges. This allows students to select the materials – and academics – most relevant to their field. This encourages a free market and access to the highest quality material available.

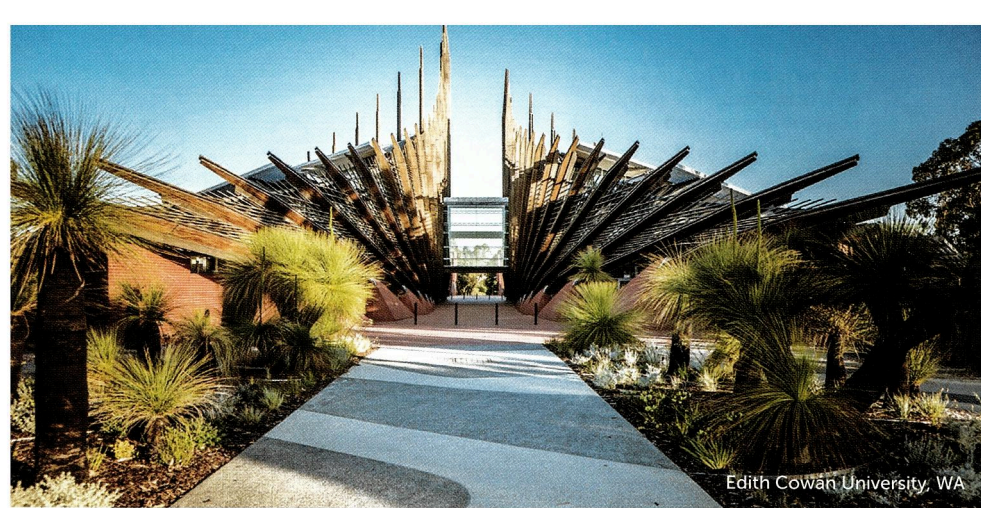
For instance, the traditional route to



Queensland University of Technology, QLD

READ MORE

- Official Journal of the European Union, Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32012H1222\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32012H1222(01))
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, CEDEFOP project: Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>
- Australian Jobs and Occupation Matrix, Department of Jobs and Small Business. <https://www.jobs.gov.au/australian-jobs-publication>



Management systems developed in the 20th century were designed to work with a world changing at a 20th-century rate, but these systems are mismatched with the 21st century. Conducting lengthy studies and formulating plans over many years may have worked well in the 1950s, but to do so in the 21st century often means implementing a response to a problem years after the fact. Shifting environments and rapid increases in knowledge require flexible learning paradigms.

CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

Post-secondary education is changing. There will no doubt be disruption into the future, with failures and successes among the many innovations that emerge (just as there was in the industrial revolution). It may take years in some countries and decades in others for the dust to settle, but just like the industrial revolution, the countries that work with new technology first will be the ones that have the greatest advantage. ■

John Mason is a Fellow Parks & Leisure Australia (FPLA), FAIH, FCIH, Principal at Australian Correspondence Schools, and board member of the Australian Garden Council.

an MBA has been to complete secondary school, then undertake three years of undergraduate and two years of post-graduate study at a university. The ATHE option can offer six levels of study, starting with a Level 3 Diploma (equal to senior secondary school) and ending with an MBA; and the student has the option of moving from one institution to another at any of those levels along the way. They can also stop and walk away with a qualification at an earlier exit point.

The ATHE system offers great flexibility and has many institutions already participating, some as diverse as Cardiff Metropolitan University (Wales), Southern Cross University (Australia), Warnborough College (UK), and Anglia Ruskin University (UK).

Woolf, the world's first block-chain university, was recently founded by University of Oxford philosopher Joshua Broggi. This is a bold initiative that potentially will allow institutions to greatly reduce bureaucracy, lower tuition costs, secure teachers income and increase interaction time between students and teachers. Succeed or fail, this development is another indication of a rapidly developing trend for universities to transform into something different or be replaced by something different in the future.

WORKING WITH CHANGE: INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

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