

## Editorial: Critic and Conscience

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Critic and conscience of society. Such are the dual roles espoused by many universities in their mission statements. But recent university audits in New Zealand have suggested that these roles tend not to be explicitly recognised, and that few formal structures are in place to support them. Jonathan Boston, in the lead article in this issue, suggests that only while universities remain non-commercial in nature can these roles be carried out effectively. A move to a more commercial ethos would not be compatible with such a legal requirement.

I believe that this *Review* is very well placed to provide a vehicle for just such responsible critique. It is required of good critics that they be penetrating, perceptive, but at the same time fair. A good conscience, on the other hand, needs to be both active and a little tender. The articles in this issue of the *Review* provide thoroughly well-documented views on important issues of the day, but at the same time, I believe, display a genuine concern to suggest ways whereby the situation in education might be improved. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that things will appear different from different perspectives, from "within" and from "without" the educational institution being considered, for example. As one peer reviewer said when critiquing an article in this issue, "It is fascinating to see how one's ideological stance ... can so strongly impact on the judgements made about the actions taken." This is fair comment. The same reviewer went on to say, "There is no doubt ... that [we] are seeking the same outcome. We differ on how that can best be achieved." But when an active conscience comes into play following a sharp critique, the debate has some promise of being constructive rather than confrontational.

Victoria University of Wellington is currently engaged in a major "refocussing" exercise. Part of this has involved an assessment of its unique features. Amongst others, these include its special opportunities to offer contestable policy advice, by virtue of its location alongside the

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seat of government for New Zealand. It has a unique opportunity to have access to trends and developments, and the chance to "keep a finger on the pulse" of the nation. This *Review*, published annually, aims to play its part in that process, providing informed comment on a number of major policy issues which have become important over the past year.

There are nine specially-commissioned articles in this issue, each subject to active peer review prior to publication, and each dealing with an important policy matter which has become current during 1996. The *Review* is a vehicle for staff of the Education Faculty itself to express their views, but a significant number of articles come from outside the university. This year, two of the articles are from graduate students at Victoria University, based on A grade assignments which they had submitted during the year. This is a welcome trend, and one which it is hoped will be continued in future issues.

The *Review* contains the usual very substantial reference section, giving it a distinctive place among similar publications from other tertiary education departments in New Zealand. This section contains a collection of information painstakingly culled from a variety of sources (including parliamentary bulletins reporting the process of legislative change in education), information which both now and in years to come should prove a compact and invaluable educational archive. This year the *Review* includes a separate glossary of some of the ever-expanding raft of mnemonics, without which education, along with every other field, seems unable to operate in today's world. It again concludes with a substantial bibliography of difficult-to-locate references drawn from the Index New Zealand (INNZ) databases, including various addresses on educational topics, conference papers, and education-related theses.

This issue of the *Review* contains some critical articles. Some of these are critical of the operations of administrative bodies such as the ERO and NZQA. Others deal with government policies and their implementation. All authors, however, have done their homework, and have carefully documented their analyses. All, too, I believe, have taken their roles as "critic and conscience" seriously. While they do (and must) take up value positions on the various issues with which they deal, their critiques are not gratuitous polemic, but carefully-considered argument. This is to be expected (and indeed required) in such a journal, and it is healthy. I believe also that the authors have a conscience, are prepared to give praise where praise is due, and suggest in their conclusions possible ways forward for the future.

There is a strong assessment and accountability flavour to many of

the articles. This is appropriate, as we scrutinise institutions in times of administrative upheaval, in order to determine their effectiveness in adjusting to rapidly changing social and political conditions.

The first two very thought-provoking articles, one by Jonathan Boston, the other by John Codd and Keith Sullivan, consider developments in the funding, governance and accountability of tertiary institutions (universities in particular), and evaluate the likely impacts of proposed government policies.

Martin Thrupp, a recent PhD graduate from Victoria University, examines the operation of the Education Review Office in its activities in a group of South Auckland schools, and compares findings with his own recent research in a group of Wellington schools from a similar socio-political context.

Next follow two critical articles which consider the operations of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, evaluating the evaluators, as it were, one within a university context, the other at the secondary school level. Both articles find cause for serious concern over issues which have come to the fore over the past year, but each article has some positive things to say about possible ways forward. Both critic and conscience are in play.

Two articles deal with assessment at the school and system level. The first, by Barbara Annesley, a graduate student, considers the development and use of performance indicators as a way of measuring the effectiveness of schools. The other, by Cedric Croft, outlines an innovation in the use of resource banks of assessment materials for teachers. These are progressively becoming available to teachers in both primary and secondary schools, over the Internet, and also have a potential role in national assessment.

Next, Judith Duncan and Lee Rowe outline events prior to the first MMP election in 1996 in the struggle for kindergarten teachers to secure improvements in their employment conditions. This article is particularly relevant in the light of recent political developments.

In the final article, Sue Brown, another graduate student, provides a concise and very helpful summary of events during 1996 in the development of policies for inclusive education for special needs students in New Zealand.

I commend these informative and thought-provoking articles to all our readers, both those in New Zealand, and those in our ever-widening audience overseas.