

University Staffing: Do we have the Right Blend?

Dr Ian Dobson

University of Helsinki

Dr Ian R Dobson is currently a research director at the University of Helsinki, his first academic appointment. In a career from the early 1970s until February 2005, he worked in planning, data analysis and institutional research at RMIT, the University of Melbourne and Monash. From 2005, he became a freelance data analyst and small-c consultant. He has been involved in many analytical studies over the years, most recently that led to the report *Unhealthy science?* for the Chief Scientist. He also revises English PhDs, papers, policy documents and websites for clients in Australia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. He has been editor of the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* since 1999, and *Australian Universities™ Review* since 2008. He has authored or co-authored about 70 papers published in scholarly journals, and a number of monographs, reports and book chapters. He commutes between Melbourne and Helsinki several times a year.

In 2010, universities had over 110,000 full-time equivalent staff, including about 17,000 casuals. There were about 27,000 teaching academics and 12,000 research academics, and 55,000 general staff. Does this sound like an appropriate blend of staff? Shouldn't the proportion of teaching academics be higher?

The size of the Australian university sector has increased considerably since 1989, the first year of the so-called Dawkins Reforms. Since then, equivalent full-time student numbers increased by 146 per cent, but teaching staff numbers by only 43 per cent. In addition, of the growth of about 11,000 teaching staff since 1989, nearly 6,000 has been of casual staff, whose proportion doubled from 12.3 per cent to 24.6 per cent. However, the number of research only academics increased from about 2,500 to over 12,000. Numbers of general staff increased by 56 per cent, to about 55,000 in 2010, but the proportion of general staff to the total has changed little, and is around 58 per cent. One thing that should be taken into account, however, is that outsourcing of activities such as cleaning and security over the past 20 years means that about 1,500 full-time jobs have been moved from the payroll. In fact, given the expansion of universities, it is likely that there would have been an increase at least in proportion to the rest of the general staff increase.

This paper will argue that the nature of change in the higher education system has created a situation whereby the limited resources that should be used to provide more full-time teachers have been diverted into hiring general staff, largely because of poor government policies and acquiescence by universities to those policies. It will also model what the shape of the university workforce WOULD have been like if the patterns in 1989 had persisted.