



BOND v GRIFFITH

PPRIVATE-public universities make sense and a merger of the private Bond University and the Gold Coast Campus of Griffith University would allow a comprehensive and innovative range of programs that would support both public and private sectors to sustain the fastest-growing area in Australia.

That is the view of Griffith University Gold Coast campus pro-vice chancellor and director Professor Jones, his colleague Associate Professor Neil Russell and Dean of Education and visiting Professor Robert Babcock, of Cornell University, which has become the standard by which many private and public universities have established.

The argument for a Bond-Griffith partnership has raged back and forth but it was only this week that Griffith's senior academics put their imprimatur on such a proposition.

With Professor Babcock, who outlined Cornell's operations, Professor Jones and Professor Russell presented their reasons in papers to the 30th National Conference of the Australian College of Education at Bond University late last year. The papers were published only last week.

How to make merger work

At present the only obstacle (presuming Bond, of course, is in agreement) is the Federal Government which is still reluctant to propose merging private and public universities, although there appears to be a softening of attitude by Federal Education Minister John Dawkins.

Their paper said that the institutions identified as possible components of a private-public university model (Bond, Griffith including the Gold Coast, possibly Gold Coast TAFE) are less than 10 years old.

"It is clearly a time, particularly given the parlous state of Australia's economy, when bold new initiatives should be grasped and one would certainly question reluctance on the

part of governments to test a new private-public university model, given the diversity of initiatives that have already been taken by governments in respect of amalgamations and consolidations during the past 10 years," it said.

POINT: A private-public university model would enhance the degree of diversity and flexibility in the system (a point also espoused by Dawkins's policy statement on higher education).

Given this support for diversity it was difficult to mount an argument that stopped short of incorporating private universities, especially when there are already precedents in Australia such as the newly created Australian Catholic University.

There must be considerable benefits in accepting a total continuum of universities that receive public and private funding and various combinations of them.

"The private-public university model would be in a superb position to accommodate the incredible growth and increasing diversity in the Brisbane-Gold Coast corridor.

POINT: A private-public university model is an extension of the independent school model.

It was ironic that the concept of private and government-funded schools was more extensively supported in Australia than the US and Canada where the system had its origins. Currently more than 28

per cent of Australian secondary students attend this kind of independent school.

In essence, a private-public university was an extension of an educational concept which had gained acceptance in Australia over a long time, had a proven record of performance and arguably a significant impact on public education.

In fact, the Gold Coast region was fast becoming the mecca of the new independent school system with more than eight such new schools opened in recent years.

POINT: A private-public university would have a dual appeal to both the public and private sector.

Both the government's higher education Green Paper (policy discussion, 1987) and White Paper (policy statement, 1988) continually referred to the fact that private enterprise had not supported higher education in Australia to the same extent as in countries like Japan, the United States, Canada and Germany.

The Gold Coast had two special features that raised the potential for success. It was driven by private enterprise and entrepreneurship and had a particular need for a strong public sector development to

accompany its growth.

It also had strong international and multicultural orientation already attuned to the need for partnership with universities.

POINT: It would enable resources and facilities to be consolidated.

Both Bond and the former Gold Coast CAE (incorporated into Griffith) had laboured under economic restraints.

As a single private-public institution the aggregate would be large and have the potential to double its growth by the turn of the century. There would be a conservation of scarce resources, but a mass of expertise.

POINT: It would provide a distinctive alternative for students and a special culture that had both national and international appeal.

POINT: The private-public university would build healthy competition and high aspirations for quality.

The future needs of higher education in the Brisbane-Gold Coast corridor supported this new model for higher education, and the opportunity for innovative thinking, compatible with the special features of the corridor.