

SUBMISSION TO AUSTRALIAN HEALTH MINISTERS ADVISORY COUNCIL ON A NATIONAL REGISTRATION AND ACCREDITATION SCHEME FOR THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Overview and Recommendation:

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) first called for national standards for health and environment protection, related occupations and supporting education in 1990. In 2008 COAG is still seeking a single national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals, to be developed by 2010. History suggests that unless COAG breaks the multiple academic, teaching and related professional and bureaucratic strangleholds on this proposed development, by inviting current or past teachers and suitably qualified others to contribute immediately to relevant national open health curriculum, the COAG goals are unlikely to be achieved for centuries, if ever.

Skills Australia, the federal government's training and advisory body, appears to be in the best initial position to undertake the necessary task of curriculum acquisition and open display for a national registration and accreditation scheme by 2010. According to the Australian Financial Review (AFR, 18.9.08, p.7) Phillip Bullock is the Chairman of Skills Australia and a former chief executive of IBM Australia and New Zealand. The seven members of the group also include Australian Industry Group chief, Heather Ridout, the Australian Council of Trade Union (ACTU) president, Sharan Burrow and the chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, Michael Keating. The organisation appears initially well placed to represent and manage the interests of learners and of the communities which those who are taught will serve. Teachers represent themselves.

The Productivity Commission discussed major skill shortages in mining in 2007, which is addressed later. Apparently, a total of 110,570 short term visas for skilled workers and their dependants (called 457 visas) were granted during the past year, which was a 27% jump over the previous year. Computing professionals, registered nurses and business professionals were the top three occupations for visa holders (AFR, 18. 9.08, p.7). The recommended open education development direction is urgent not only to avoid inflation as a result of skills shortages but also to bring about necessary economies of teaching scale and ensure performance competency levels may be assessed quickly, effectively and fairly.

Curriculum I wrote when teaching at Sydney University Faculty of Health Sciences is offered for consideration and development in this context. See the related article attached which is entitled 'Health and education for sustainable development and the Australian Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme'. A response to the current Department of Defence discussion paper entitled 'Key Questions for Defence in the 21st Century and feedback on training entitled 'A Practical Guide to Running and Participating in the Tender Process' which was recently provided by Phillips Fox to members of the Institute of Public Affairs of Australia (IPAA) are also attached for consideration in the international context which Australians now inhabit. I do not trust the quality and intentions of costly education which is unavailable for scrutiny. One does not choose a car as a result of the peer reviews of manufacturers. Neither should students have to keep buying educational pigs in pokes.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) appears impotent and unable to meet its own goals

COAG first called for national standards for health and environment protection, related occupations and supporting education in 1990. In 2008 COAG is still seeking national standards for occupations, beginning with the following health professions:

Physiotherapy, optometry, nursing and midwifery, chiropractic care, pharmacy, dental care (dentists, dental hygienists, dental prosthetists and dental therapists), medicine, psychology and osteopathy.

How hard can it be to put the key curriculum content taught in the above courses out on a table and come up with a sensible national curriculum which rationally links curriculum taught in universities and other registered training organizations (RTOs)? While COAG, academics and RTO teachers, the professions and related bureaucrats appear to have achieved almost nothing in relation to this task in 18 years, people working in Microsoft and Google have brought about an international information revolution. It seems evil and stupid not to make use of their amazing achievements to educate everybody as effectively and cheaply as possible. This is in everybody's interest, including teachers. The practice of subsidising a tiny minority of poor and perhaps clever youth to study in wealthy countries at obscenely unnecessary expense is part of the global problem because if they can, they often sensibly leave the places they have come from. Was it Neville Wran who said, 'the best thing about the working class is being out of it'? I guess economists agree.

All Australian governments passed mutual recognition legislation to prepare for national competition legislation in 1995. The Productivity Commission (PC) review of the primary sector (2007) indicated the COAG initiatives to facilitate mutual recognition of many skilled occupations under state legislation have also made little progress. It stated COAG programs should be broadened to cover all trades experiencing severe skills shortages, including for the primary sector (2007, p. 224). Based on projected future expansion, the minerals sector will require 75% (or 70000) more employees by 2015 than in 2005. The worst shortages are likely to be for semi-skilled workers and trades (PC, 2007, p.217). Labour shortages in mining and construction are likely to create inflation. One wonders who will deliver the huge skills development programs necessary to implement the National Rental Affordability Scheme and other infrastructure projects, let alone accommodate the conceptual changes necessary in many professions as a result of new international requirements for sustainable development and carbon trading. The current financial meltdown in the US makes the idea of continued US domination of financial education particularly alarming. A recent correspondent to the AFR points out the irony that Lehman Brothers, which has been very busy selling hypothetical climate and carbon price projections over the next 100 years to investors, was apparently unable to predict an event much closer to home – it's own demise (AFR, 22.9.08, p.68). It is dangerous for Australians to be driven by US financial rulers and acolytes. The latter seem not to deliver education or evidence based reporting, as much as propaganda and contacts for the chosen.

The national president of the Institute of Public Administration of Australia (IPAA), Andrew Podger, recently said COAG had an uncertain capacity to deliver the agenda for human services reform, relied too much on bureaucratic processes, had a lack of clear roles and responsibilities and had problems with information technology (Australian Financial Review (AFR) 19.9.08, p.63). COAG is not the only body full of problems. Academics, other teachers, their supporting professions, public servants and lawyers may often operate unwillingly, if at all, to achieve COAG national goals. COAG meets intermittently and also relies primarily on these comparatively narrow vested interests which also pose as undeniable experts, for advice. The latter groups have always been taught not to step outside their nurturing bureaucratic silos and collegiate cultures. They can see the wisdom of this as a result of the rewards such action has already brought them and usually ignore the difficulties of reconciling the sharply divergent notions of evidence found in non-competing paradigms such as law, the medical and engineering sciences, or in economics and finance. Courts wielding rules which are often based on feudal propositions will ultimately control the other groups when any disputes arise. Courts thereby create 'junk science'. (The idea of 'junk courts' is naturally inconceivable.)

The recent scientific concept of sustainable development strongly challenges the feudal foundations on which law, related financial expectations and their evidence paradigms have historically been based, in part through the expectations of commercial in confidence behaviour, rather than the open provision of reliable information. There are many other feudal legal principles which suggest that ignorance in decision making strongly equates with bliss. On the other hand, perfect information is necessary for the perfect market and the absence of reliable information has also led to the current US financial crisis. The common financial ignorance, it seems, has also led to lack of financial trust. Prayer being the main alternative to reliable information, it is no wonder the US is such a pious nation.

Sustainable development is, of course, a much more recent scientific notion than the concept of the perfect market. However, what Machiavelli said in 1513 remains still true today, at least in my experience. He said:

‘There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. The innovator has as enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions and only lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.

In the current international context, where scientific requirements for sustainable development, open markets, the law and religion may contest, it is vital that all education is as broadly delivered and open to continuing testing and debate as possible, for this is the broadly scientific approach necessary in the new global environment. The Labor politicians who make up COAG, however, are likely to rely substantially for advice upon representatives of the current state teaching, health professional, bureaucratic and related interests, as well as upon a minority of Australian lawyers, for their re-election. They certainly won't want to upset many other Australian lawyers either, in my experience. Thus all seem likely to drag their feet interminably, rather than creating an effective national system. The only way to get round this that I can see is by the open curriculum

development approach, placed in the hands of an independent body like Skills Australia, which may also co-opt others in the public interest.

One assumes the ideal of perfect information is often ignored by economists and others allied to the lawyer, in order to maximise their incomes, and perhaps their peace of mind. However, without open education, open management and open communication systems, which are all anathema to feudal cultures, the poor will often keep on losing, unless they are also successfully feudal, which often means willingly violent. All feudal development routes, which are based on the pursuit of family and brotherhood interests and related secrecy may join up, once those travelling them become powerful enough, with the ruling international capitalist financial management classes, through the common preservation of their commercial in confidence expectations. Feudal management styles, however, are comparatively uncompetitive. This is because they may not only provide the richest and most powerful with accumulating wealth from the common financial pools as a result of their continuing management secrecy requirements, but must also buy off subordinate interests along a great many related product development chains. In such an international context, it may often be difficult to differentiate between what may best be considered corrupt, and what may best be thought of merely as business as usual. Openness is better.

In March 2008 COAG stated that all professionals in the listed health occupations will be covered by the national scheme by 2010. The national scheme seeks:

- To provide for the protection of the public by ensuring that only practitioners who are suitably training and qualified to practise in a competent and ethical manner are registered
- To facilitate workforce mobility across Australia and reduce red tape for practitioners
- To facilitate the provision of high quality education and training and rigorous and responsive assessment of overseas-training practitioners;
- Have regard to the public interest in promoting access to health services; and
- To have regard to the need to enable the continuous development of a flexible, responsive and sustainable Australian health workforce and enable innovation in education and service delivery

The scheme will supposedly also operate in a transparent, accountable, efficient, effective and fair manner. It will supposedly also ensure that fees and charges are reasonable and should recognise that the restrictions on the practice of a profession should only occur where the benefits of the restriction to the community as a whole outweigh the costs. As a result of the above COAG and my related personal experience since 1990, I confidently predict that it will be impossible to achieve any of the above goals unless COAG goes outside the usual channels in order to establish a body that will collect and openly display the national curriculum for the health occupations that it names as first priority. Such curriculum does not require the immutable legal status that monotheists and lawyers like. Broadly scientific and comparative open curriculum approaches are better and cheaper. Following the single ideal text is an outdated approach in modern, outcomes based views of law and education. One may try to achieve a goal by a variety of comparative means.

Collegiate teaching cultures are ineffective and unwilling providers of open education

University Education:

In 1910 Weber keenly understood the feudal problems which many Australians still struggle to address through dysfunctional governance institutions. For example, he wrote:

‘As soon as intellectual and aesthetic education becomes a profession, its representatives are bound by an inner affinity to all the carriers of ancient social culture who doubt that the dominion of capital can give better, more lasting guarantees to personal liberty and to the development of intellectual, aesthetic and social culture than the aristocracy of the past has given’(They) stand in deep antipathy opposed to the inevitable development of capitalism and refuse cooperation in the rearing of the structures of the future’. (Cited in Seidman 1983, p. 211).

It seemed a good idea to Christians long ago to write and print the Bible to communicate the Word of their particular God. In 2008, it seems an obvious idea to take similarly open approaches to creating curriculum for skills development nationally and globally. Once some requisite education is made transparent to all, others could then follow it or attack it and justify their own versions. Such debates appear part of the scientific and related civilizing and democratic processes. Why should the medieval, word of mouth approach to most education, which is still taken in most universities, be supported by governments whose duty is ideally to its citizens and their related industry? Academic careers may currently be built on colleagues contributing to text books which get published outside the academic institutions if the writers can guarantee enough students will purchase the books. However, students already pay outrageous fees for their tuition. This is not good enough.

The British direction is instructive in this context. In 1962, Michael Young, a sociologist, proposed an Open University (OU), to prepare people for external degrees of London University. The British Broadcasting Commission (BBC) and the Ministry of Education were then discussing plans for a College of the Air, according to the current OU website, from which the following account is taken. An experiment on radio and television - a ‘University of the Air’ was finally proposed and met ‘hostility and indifference’ from civil servants and academics alike. However, Walter Perry was appointed as the first OU Vice-Chancellor (VC) and the first students began work in 1971. Perry said later:

I came to the OU from a wholly traditional background, having spent most of my working life as a member of the staff of the Medical Research Council and as Professor of Pharmacology at Edinburgh.....I had heard about the University of the Air, but I regarded it as a political gimmick unlikely ever to be put into practice. It wasn’t until I read the advertisement for the post of VC that I began to think seriously about the proposal and the challenge presented. It wasn’t that I had any deep-seated urge to mitigate the miseries of the depressed adult; it was that I

was persuaded that the standard of teaching in conventional universities was pretty deplorable. It suddenly struck me that if you could use the media and devise course materials that would work for students all by themselves, then inevitably you were bound to affect – for good – the standard of teaching in conventional universities. I believed that to be so important that it overrode almost everything else. And that is what I said in my application.

Perry's position is the same that I now put to you. The Australian government's announcement of an 'education revolution' in late 2007, aimed to provide each school child with access to a personal computer, the 'tool-box of the future'. The development of open education curriculum at every level should be considered in this context. The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) also recently outlined its plans for five new channels in the Sydney Morning Herald (17.4.08, p.11). ABC5 will be the Educational Channel providing English and foreign language tuition, curriculum material and an integral digital resource for a newly developed national schools curriculum, with at least 50 percent Australian content to meet teachers' and students' needs. Coordinated consideration and attainment of open education and related entertainment content is now vitally necessary, so learning on the job and away from it is easier for everybody. I recall seeing somewhere in the press that Chinese government representatives indicated in discussions with Australian counterparts that it is easier for China to achieve something big than small. What a major relief that must be! Why not jointly consider education?

The closed, computer-based, distance education initiatives which multiple collegiate enclaves have individually developed and Australian universities have individually funded are comparatively little utilized (Gallagher 2000; Nelson 2002), their production costs are more expensive than classroom teaching and they have not made money (Marginson 2004). These curriculum products are not open to scrutiny so quality can be judged by hardly anyone except the students who have already paid dearly to consume them. Systems are not set up to utilize the wonderful archives possessed by Australian radio, video, television and newspapers. Australian emphasis on education partnerships which operate, like the OU, to maximise education quality, access and scale are necessary. Open curriculum, communicated broadly and flexibly, provides a much better guarantee of quality education which can reach wider audiences faster to create learning networks better. Students and communities may implement basic skills and governance principles related to injury prevention and rehabilitation, by doing practical exercises in the consultative identification and control of risks, in work or other community settings. Many may usefully make short films or similar products as part of their assessments.

Open education, like that delivered internationally by the OU, which aims for education quality, access and scale of delivery, in cooperation with regional communities and their tutors, is now an urgently necessary product for Australia, to develop new skills for sustainable development, greater social equality and to control inflation. The OU usually requires no entry qualifications for undergraduates studying for degrees or at lower certificate levels and it regards student exit levels as more important than entry levels. The OU is incorporated as a charity. In 2003, the Sunday Times University Guide (14.9.03) rated the OU as 5th best in national teaching assessments by students. Cambridge

University was first and Oxford sixth. Make of that what you will. I want to see the content being assessed. Depending on the consumer needs and context, education quality may be partly in the eye of the beholder. The popular is not to everybody's taste.

The elite Group of 8 Universities Response to the Expert Advisory Group's Preferred Model paper for the Research Quality Framework (RQF 2005) identified the need for a clear statement of research purpose in relation to application of the RQF. The first two points of the Group of 8 proposed purposes for the RQF were:

- To provide governments and business with the additional information they need to assess the value of their investments in research
- To provide researchers and institutions with the additional information they need to plan future research strategies.

Students and potential students, as well as the above stakeholders, would benefit from the provision of freely available undergraduate or related curriculum content. This could provide clear information upon which training for research might be expected to develop.

Registered Training Organizations:

In the Australian national training system, as distinct from in universities, Industry Skills Councils are responsible for consulting with employers, employees and other key industry stakeholders to identify current and anticipated skill needs of a particular industry sector. Training packages outlining competencies are developed and approved by all state and territory training authorities prior to submission to the National Quality Council for endorsement. Once endorsed, the packages are delivered and recognised across Australian jurisdictions and become available on the National Training Information Service website. However, such packages are not curriculum. Registered training organizations have responsibility for design and delivery of curriculum. Teachers who meet the training and assessment competencies outlined in Appendix 2 of the Australian Quality Teaching Framework 2007, which is entitled Essential Standards for Registration and provided by the National Audit and Registration Agency, may develop learning strategies and deliver programs. My guess is that any currently employed teacher is considered to be fine. After searching all the above-mentioned, extremely confusing websites, I still have little or no idea what anyone actually teaches in the classroom and wonder who does and how. My experience of working in academia and the public service is also that it is very difficult to know what any teachers are actually saying or doing, without going into their classes.

I retired from Sydney University in 2007. I am very happy about this except that I no longer have the capacity to use the basic curriculum on risk management principles that I once taught across most professional schools of the faculty of Health Sciences. I assume Sydney University no longer uses the curriculum I provided and that the content, which thousands of students learned and paid dearly for over eleven years, is now considered pointless and worthless. As a result of organizational restructure it increasingly made way for psychology professors who could also attract research grants, or for younger psychologists who might otherwise be unemployed as a result of the university restructure.

Psychologists breed like rabbits, with help from their US friends. At Sydney University they also think they are engaged in science, rather than social science, even though they may mainly hand out questionnaires and turn the box ticks into numbers. This may lead to an authoritarian perspective, in my view. In Britain, judging by the Wellcome medical display in the British museum of science, psychology superficially appears more likely to be conceived as a way of assisting the telling of stories about the self. This seems a more accurate and less dangerous approach to me, unless the psychologist is dealing directly with the organ of the brain, as distinct from the mind and its directed expression in language or writing. Such issues are of concern for health services other than education.

In the past month, I have sent emails to the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council on three occasions, asking how I should proceed if I wish to become an accredited trainer in order to have my curriculum considered for use by a Registered Training Package Developer such as the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council. The organization has not replied. Only one of the other Industry Skills Councils has responded to the same question, which I have now posed to them all. The Industry Business Services Association (IBSA) suggested I contact the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council. The Industry Skills Councils appear to be tightly closed. Why are they so reluctant to reply? Does the costly new bureaucracy nevertheless have little impact on the same old highly variable training practices? Who knows?

In general, students who hate writing and teachers who hate constantly replying to individual students' questions and marking many individuals' voluminous projects, may agree strongly about the desirability of multiple-choice exams and the related utility of tick the box questionnaires. Students are also less likely to feel that they can argue with a numerical score than with others' opinions, which may be relaxing for all involved. (It's the number, Stupid?) However, I think such pressure for numerical scores often creates bad education, with little teacher and student feedback along the way. Students are instead encouraged to become rote learners, who may think that numbers and objectivity are identical. They may also avoid any broader learning and application of knowledge and related critical analysis in potentially useful ways to help regional or related workplace communities, while they gain the certificates which supposedly prove their proficiency. What good is education without a related demonstration by the student of the facility to critically analyse information, apply the results of gathered knowledge and express the outcome of having apparently gained it? The essence of scientific development is also the capacity for such evidence based activity. The importance of open curriculum content and assessment product, compared with the potential for misleading information as a result of numerical expressions of competency, appear to require consideration in this context.

Public Service Education:

The Institute of Public Affairs of Australia (IPAA), of which Andrew Podger is president, is an association for public servants and related others, of which I am also a member. As I understand it from information provided by IPAA NSW in 2007, the organization has agreements with two registered training organizations and a number of universities to provide teachers (facilitators) and related professional certificates through suitable

teaching articulations under its Learning and Development Program. According to the IPAA NSW Professional Development 2008 Calendar for state, local and federal government, the course participant or her financial supporter usually pays around \$1000 for a two day course and \$600 for a one day course. The number of courses and training days was expected to expand in 2008. IPAA NSW appears to have recently developed a new agreement with the lawyers Philips Fox, who will soon be giving a training event entitled Green Procurement at a cost of \$44 for two hours, plus refreshments. I have no idea of IPAA NSW training quality because it has been too costly for me to undertake. Philips Fox training for IPAA, on the other hand, is comparatively cheap and has been presented at least 3 times so far in 2008. I attach feedback on training by Phillips Fox after I attended their short course entitled 'A Practical Guide to Running and Participating in the Tender Process'. Among other problems, the training ignored all treasury requirements on tendering, which are voluminous. Surely this cannot be acceptable? On the other hand, treasury tender requirements seem to me to present a long, incomprehensible, nightmare.

I recently wrote to IPAA that I think the current selection of trainers, training content and its provision needs to be clearly justified publicly, to avoid any appearance of potential waste, mismanagement or corruption in a variety of forms. I am sure I do not need to spell out in detail how such potential problems might work. If I were in COAG, I would want changes in the IPAA NSW Learning and Development program partly because it generally appears unnecessarily closed and expensive, especially if public service departments are funding it, out of their budgets or from other publicly provided funding. The current IPAA curriculum is opaque, inflexible and it does not meet the development requirements and potential of an education revolution, from my perspective. How well does it support the need for skilled and sustainable development? How does it address the latter? Phillips Fox is about to provide its course on Green Procurement but I doubt the lawyers' capacity on anything unless many traditional legal principles are left behind. Why pay for them?

In 2008, IPAA NSW investigated what government CEOs and others want 'with respect to professional development, member services and policy practice'. If I were a CEO I would want to know exactly what was currently being taught and how it would meet my organizational needs, especially in regard to sustainable development, as flexibly, effectively and cheaply as possible. What exactly is the curriculum content presented and how does it relate to the attainment of Australia's new national environment and development goals, especially in infrastructure, housing and the introduction of the carbon pollution reduction scheme in 2010? By offering its current curriculum products to Skills Australia, to meet sustainable development needs and identified skills shortages, IPAA could also encourage universities and registered training organizations to cooperate better.

Open Source Education: Where information technology enthusiasts teach all:

I am technophobic and think that Microsoft, Google and email are some of the best things that have ever happened to communication and to me. I also think the simplest and best approach to open learning for certain subjects is that used by Australian government inquiries. Typically, an organization like the PC writes a discussion paper in relation to the inquiry terms of reference and both can be downloaded in a single operation. One may

answer the questions posed by the discussion paper or provide discussion of one's own and email it back to the PC or relevant other body as a submission. This is, I think, the quickest, simplest and most obvious way of learning, unless still or moving images are considered better. The inquiry secretariat puts all the submissions on its website and they can be downloaded for consideration. In my view, it is unlikely to be possible to undertake sustained analysis and response effectively without downloading documents in question for close and holistic consideration.

The above communication and mutual education method contrasts, in my experience, with the requirements of 'open source' education development, at least as it is practiced by Curriki and in a new OU venture, discussed later. I first heard about 'open source' from a computer expert who recommended the Ubuntu site as a means of posting curriculum supposedly to help the world's poor, who might download it free to help their education. A key problem with this approach is that the curriculum posted is not normally clearly related to specific assessment and certification processes, and one knows how important these are in order to get ahead. However, I thought I would try to post my own curriculum on the Ubuntu site, for the experience of doing so. I am hopeless and gave up. After about a month, the Ubuntu people responded unhelpfully to my earlier plea for help.

The problem with open source education, from my perspective, becomes instantly apparent when one uses Google to find out what it is. These information developers may be IT development world champions, but their capacity to express themselves logically, effectively and willingly in other subject areas is distinctly limited, in my opinion. The Wikipedia definition of open source has a warning which says the neutrality of the message is disputed and should not be quoted until the dispute is resolved. However, nothing I could find makes better sense than the Wikipedia explanation below which states:

Open source is a development methodology which offers practical accessibility to a product's source (goods and knowledge). Some consider open source as one of various possible design approaches, while others consider it a critical strategic element of their operations. Before open source became widely adopted, developers and producers used a variety of phrases to describe it. The term open source gained popularity with the rise of the Internet, which provided access to diverse production models, communication paths and interactive communities. The open source model of operation and decision making allows concurrent input of different agendas, approaches and priorities, and differs from the more closed, centralized models of development. The principles and practices are commonly applied to the development of source code for software that is made available for public collaboration, and it is usually released as open-source software.

After reading the above I'm still not exactly sure what open source is, but whenever I have come across it, I find I hate it. I may be cynical, but the main feature of its operation often appears to me to be that it is primarily a commercial development system posing as philanthropic. Personally, I much prefer the Microsoft approach, where someone phenomenally clever produces something comparatively user friendly and then becomes

phenomenally rich, and establishes something phenomenally philanthropic like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This charitable foundation has an extremely well thought out, well organized and holistic health development program, as far as I can see. However the US government, in yet another example of its economic wisdom, took Microsoft to court. About five years ago, I emailed Bill Gates personally with a curriculum proposal when he was at Microsoft. Somebody emailed back and asked me to fill in a computer form which didn't relate to me as I am not a company. When I emailed to point this out we had an email exchange to sort this out. It took just over a week for Microsoft to reject my proposal. As I recall, the reason they gave was something like I was too small for them to bother about. I have never had such excellent service from Australian government, let alone any other private sector organisation. The latter always operate like they are impenetrable fortresses, or an Industry Skills Council, in my experience.

I get the impression that open source education websites are run by a comparatively small circle of colleagues who are thrilled with the place that speaking computer fluently has got them. Curriki website, for example, 'is an online environment created to support the development and provide free education materials to anyone who needs them'. It is the result of work done for the Global Education and Learning Centre started by Sun Microsystems. I put a little of my curriculum on their site with horrible difficulty and only bothered doing so as an experiment. I first heard about Curriki at the UN Conference on Reinventing Government in Vienna. It appears to be hosted in Washington DC and recently this 'online community' was named a 2008 Tech Awards Laureate, 'one of 25 global innovative technology providers to benefit humanity and spark global change', according to the panel that selected them. Take a look at the site, the material on it and consider how it might be used, by whom and what they might get out of doing so. It seems a comparatively slow and random process of developing very little to me.

On the other hand, the Openlearn site represents the OU bid, 'to place itself once again at the forefront of the educational use of information technology.....It undertakes experimental activities to develop and test radical new business models based on free access to learning materials and tools'. It began operation in 2006 and was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for three years. OpenLearn states that it contributes to 'the new generation of OU researches' in several ways:

- Through its commitment to using open source software and standards to encourage reuse and remix in even the most remote parts of the world (they must be kidding?)
- The use of social software to connect learners in peer supported communities
- Providing structured study materials and sense-making software to help learners to get the most from their learning

I put some curriculum on OpenLearn with difficulty. In my view it is generally better than Curriki, but exactly the same criticisms apply. The way the Openlearn site works is currently separate from the normal form of OU operation, in which a student normally works in close interaction with a tutor in order to address a body of information with which they have been provided and on which they will be assessed for certification. Openlearn states that it currently assumes 'the ideal characteristics of web-based learning

materials are limited text and plenty of interactivity'. This seems actually to mean that it usually takes a lot of clicks to download isolated sentences or paragraphs, which mainly looks to me like a perfect system for people who hate to read and write. OpenLearn is currently undertaking development with a group in Brazil. (I wonder who funds that.) US money behind computers is driving some poor approaches to curriculum in my opinion.

Final Discussion

The internet, computers, TV and videos provide the most amazing potential for fast and effective skills development and related education since books escaped monasteries and their priestly guardians. The 20th century technologies mean a massive reduction in the need for constantly re-inventing the wheel, as is normally done by teachers talking in classrooms which are often far away, and to which students drag themselves, often at high cost and inconveniently. Ideally, all tertiary staff and students could co-ordinate their communications and related technology services to develop a better grounding for work in any industry. Part of the answer to developing a globally innovative and competitive Australian film industry, for example, appears to be to analyse and meet the education and entertainment needs of Australians and others together. Currently, however, the full potential of much staff and student educational or entertainment product is lost and the employment of students by staff is also made much harder, because of the balkanized communication systems run for staff, postgraduate, undergraduate and other students. The various research, teaching and administration services of the universities and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) do not normally work together helpfully on their membership communication. The service and productivity gains for staff, students and many others which could be derived from more effectively coordinated tertiary education, related communication and information technology management systems would be great. Yet there is huge resistance to better management. This is the result of many collegiate cultures, including open source. They are dysfunctional for all.

In general, academic and other teachers appear to support the combination of narrowly regulated professional requirements and skill shortages, which reflect and support their industrial interests, regardless of the wider impact of this on industry and international society as a whole. All such teachers normally appear to do all within their power to design the student educational experience in the interests of their particular teaching body, to protect the level of status and control of those currently teaching. If one felt this was also done to protect the standard of services their particular brand of students will deliver to the public one would not mind so much. However, if teachers are so concerned about professional standards, why do they resist their curriculum being open, so that it can be judged by anyone? (Putting aside, of course, the few who do open source development and whose greatest gift appears to be the ability to speak computer.) One is not forced to buy a car unseen, on the basis of ratings provided by groups of self-interested car makers. One should be able to see the curriculum product so as to judge it, whether or not one decides to buy the process of teaching support and assessment which leads to certification.

