The Academic Structure

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In the first handbooks and other explanatory documents distributed by La Trobe University, the institution was at pains to explain why the original planning committee — the Third University Committee as it came to be called — had adopted a ‘school’ rather than the traditional ‘faculty’ structure in its academic organisation. The traditional structure, it was argued, had ‘been designed for about 3,000 students and had not been found to work properly for 10,000 students.’ The school system, the grouping together of like disciplines in aggregations smaller and more cohesive both intellectually and administratively, was seen to be the answer. Each school would be administered by a dean, and headed academically by professors, ‘who should number overall at least one per 100 students in the university’, and who would assist the dean in his administrative role, ‘commensurate with their special knowledge and ability.’ The professors, however, would not be heads of departments, as in the more traditional institutions, for there were to be no formal departments, but disciplines. The administrative unit, however, was to be the school.

The Third University Committee did not, of course, come to this decision out of a clear, blue sky. All over the British Commonwealth, with the expansion of higher education made necessary both by the post-war ‘baby boom’ and the expectations generated by increasing affluence and rising expectations, new institutions were being created. Of enormous influence in this process was the University of Sussex, which first departed from the faculty structure in favour of the school system. Sussex, in fact became the model in the 1960s for a host of new institutions in Britain, in Canada, in New Zealand, in Australia, whose planners were looking for new, more relevant ways of departing from traditional disciplinary boundaries which, it was believed, the departmental administrative structure reinforced. La Trobe’s decision therefore has to be seen in this context.

Today, even though La Trobe’s schools continue to thrive, it would have to be said that the notions of the ‘Founding Fathers’, very quickly became obsolete. Departments flourished in Bundoora’s receptive soil, indeed by 1971 they had become firmly entrenched as the University’s key administrative and academic units, to the extent that single discipline schools, such as Agriculture, and later Economics, became known as ‘one-department’ institutions. Budgets were decided on departmental lines, professors, far from being freed from administrative duties of a departmental kind, found themselves as department chairmen (not ‘chairpersons’ in those days) and, most telling of all, the statutory school meeting, the forum where school members would meet to thrash out common academic problems, was progressively diminished in importance till its final disappearance in most schools around 1978. Tradition, in most important ways, supplanted innovation.

There were two basic reasons for this, perhaps the first of the significant changes to occur in La Trobe’s academic structure. In the first place, it would have to be said that a number of the foundation professors were uneasy at the prospect of having little official responsibility for, or control over, either the formal development of their disciplines or of those appointed to teach in them. The notion that this belonged to the dean, and to the dean alone, was anathema to some, and they worked hard to change it. They wanted to be heads of department,
they believed administrative and academic leadership could not be separated in the way the school structure seemed to imply, and if it took the imposition of a departmental system on it to secure their point of view, so be it.

It was not only the professors who felt this way, however. Many of those appointed to the lecturing staff felt uneasy in an interdisciplinary situation. Products of departments themselves, they too wished to see the familiar structure recreated.

Finally, the mushrooming growth of some sections of the University quickly ensured that the school would lose some of its functions. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the Schools of Humanities and Social Sciences. Almost from the beginning it was clear that the science schools were going to have difficulty sustaining their projected growth rates. There simply were insufficient qualified applicants for them to be able to do so. Yet the University’s growth rate had to be maintained, to attract the funding necessary for sustained development. The answer, therefore, was to increase rapidly the growth rates in those schools where qualified applicants abounded — Humanities and Social Sciences. Both Schools grew so rapidly, both in terms of student and staff numbers, that the school as the key academic unit quickly became far too large to function effectively. At the end of 1968, for example, there were twelve staff teaching history, by the beginning of 1970 there were 33. In 1968 there were 7 sociologists, one year later, there were 17. Economics staff numbers jumped from nine to 23 in the same period. A combination, then, of rapidly increasing staff numbers and the preferences of the vast majority of them quickly resulted in the ‘departmentalisation’ of the university, despite the intentions of those who had planned it.

This first substantial change in the University’s structure, and the circumstances which had brought it about, soon led to others. Perhaps the most important were those affecting the University’s most important institution of academic governance, the Academic Board.

Again, in a break from tradition, the University’s planners decided not to establish a professorial board as its senior academic policy-making body. Instead, they decided on an ‘Academic Board’, to be smaller in size than a professorial board, and with substantial sub-professorial representation, and equal representation for each school. The Deans, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Librarian were to be members ex-officio. In addition, each school was to have one professorial and one non-professorial representative, to be elected by members of the school.

The Academic Board, chosen under the above provisions, first met on 30 June, 1967, yet hardly had it done so when there were calls for its reform, and these gained in intensity as the numerical imbalance between the Science and Arts halves of the University grew more acute. In particular, the large schools wanted proportional rather than equal representation, arguing that the existing system led to gross inequities, and gave to the smaller schools a degree of influence on the formation of University policy which their size simply did not warrant.

In time, their views were heeded, particularly after the creation of the School of Education added a new and powerful voice to the debate. The composition of the Academic Board was reviewed in 1971, and in 1972, after protracted and at times bitter argument, the Board was reconstituted along proportional lines. School membership was henceforth to be tied to the number of professors in each school. Small schools with four or less established chairs were entitled to only one representative, those with five to eight chairs to two, nine to twelve to three, thirteen to sixteen to four, and schools with over seventeen established chairs to five. The balance between professorial and non-professorial staff was to be maintained, and the ex-officio membership did not change. Thus, the proponents of proportional representation according to school size won a major victory over those who argued for equality between schools on the ground that, as the Board was supposed to take a university view, relative school size was of no consideration. It represented not only a major shift in the Board’s balance, but also in the University’s philosophy.

The ‘new’ Academic Board began operating in 1972, with the provision that a further review would take place after five years. This did not occur for a variety of reasons, not the
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least of which was the fact that in mid-July, 1977, the new Vice-Chancellor took up office, and it seemed hardly fair to hit him immediately with the prospect of changing the University's most important policy-making body. Moreover, Academic Board agreed in June of that year to the appointment of a committee to inquire into, and make recommendations on, all aspects of university government — the important Reid Committee, of which more later. Obviously the structure, composition and function of the Board would come within the purview of this committee.

The Reid Committee did in fact scrutinise the role of the Board carefully, and though it stopped short of recommending changes to its membership, it nevertheless drew attention to considerable unhappiness within the university as to its structure. In particular, ran its report, 'the main dissatisfaction is with the present School representation system.' There was, the report continued, still bitter division as to equal versus proportional representation. Though the Reid Committee, believing that the Academic Board should, 'take a University view' on matters of policy, 'ideally' favoured 'equal representation of all major teaching and research areas', yet it recognised 'the reality of the situation' that such a proposal would be unlikely to be 'endorsed by the University Community.' Yet the current situation, in particular the linking of membership to the number of chairs in each School was hard to justify. The committee, then, recommended 'that the University now undertake a further review of the composition of the Academic Board', and that particular attention should be given to ensuring that professorial representation should be kept at an acceptable level.

After some delay, an Academic Board Review Committee was set up early in 1980 under the Chairmanship of the Chief Librarian, Mr D. H. Borchardt. The Committee deliberated for much of the year, reporting in November, and proposing far-reaching changes to the Board's composition and function. Without doubt the most controversial of these was the recommendation that an Academic Senate should be established. This was to be a broadly based consultative body, to which all senior members of the university would belong, including of course, all professors, which would deliberate on all important matters of academic policy. Obviously, the proposal was an attempt to address the frequently-heard complaint that, with the progressive 'democratisation' of University government, and, in particular, the provision for elected, non-professorial deans and chairmen, some professors were finding it extremely difficult to find a forum on which to exercise the role of academic leadership their position supposedly invested in them. The University community, was, however, not remotely sympathetic to the idea, and it quickly vanished from the scene.

There was much broader support for the reforms to the composition of the Academic Board suggested by the Borchardt Committee. The Committee recommended that proportional representation should continue, but that the basis for differentiation should no longer be the number of chairs in a School, but rather the number of its full-time academic staff. This was subsequently modified by the Board itself which in March 1981 carried a motion basing membership on 'the number of units of 500 WSU, or part thereof, enrolled in each school.' The continued representation of the professorial staff was ensured by the provision that in schools with two or more elected members, one must be a professor, and by the introduction a new category of members, those elected at large across the University. The Borchardt Committee recommended the addition of four 'at large' professorial representatives and though the Academic Board subsequently modified this to two professorial and two non-professorial members, the principle was clearly established, and, as such, represented a departure from previous policy.

Its adoption also contributed to the growth in size of the Board, as did the provision for student membership, initially set in train in 1982, but not completed until the La Trobe University Act was changed several years later. The establishment of the new School of Mathematical and Information Sciences in 1985 further increased the Board's size. Membership of the Board in that year was thirty-seven, not counting the students in attendance as observers pending the changing of the Act. The Borchardt Committee had recommended a further review of the
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Board in 1985. This was deferred for three years, till 1988. During this time its size was increased even further by the addition of the Dean and four elected members from the new School of Health Sciences, together with five student members. When the Board met in February 1988 it numbered 48. Clearly, if one of the objectives of the original planning committee had been to create a policy-making body smaller and less amorphous and therefore more efficient than the traditional professorial board, the passage of time and the processes of growth had served to nullify its intent.

The Academic Board recognised this, and moved to rectify it. At its meeting of 17 February, it set up a committee, again under the chairpersonship of the Chief Librarian, to review the Board's composition and structure, yet again. The Gow Committee met frequently during the first half of 1988 eventually producing a report which recommended a reduction in the number of elected members from both the schools and the student body, doing away completely with members-at-large and with the ex-officio position of past deputy chairperson, and abolishing the distinction between professorial and non-professorial members. Though both Pro-Vice-Chancellors and the Vice-Principal were added to the Board's voting membership, the net result of the Committee's report — eventually accepted virtually unamended after prolonged debate — was a Board reduced in size from forty-eight to forty-one. The Gow Committee further recommended substantial changes in procedures, including switching from afternoon to morning meetings, all in the search for greater efficiency. Whether this has been achieved will doubtless be eventually revealed.

One of the reasons for the rapid growth in Academic Board numbers was the fact that the University's original four Schools had grown to ten by the beginning of 1988. Of these, two had always been planned. The Schools of Agriculture and Education, which began teaching in 1969 and 1970 respectively, were always in the original master plan, and their creation was thus part of the orderly process of development. The same could be said about the School of Behavioural Sciences which was created in 1973, with its centrepiece the Department of Psychology. There was controversy preceding and following the appointment of the foundation professor, George Singer, as to where the new department should be located, with some strongly advocating its incorporation into the School of Social Sciences. Both the research interests of Professor Singer, however, and his strong advocacy, dictated the establishment of a new school, one with close attachments to the biological sciences, but administratively independent from them. There had always been strong support for a School of Behavioural Sciences. Its creation, therefore, should also be seen as occurring within the broad parameters of the master plan.

Rather different were the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the School of Economics. Economics was a foundation department in the School of Social Sciences, indeed the School's first two deans were both economists. Yet it was not long before tensions developed within that School, mainly to do with the economists' increasing concern with professionalisation, the notion that, as they were training economists, they had less and less in common with the other departments of the School whose task was rather to provide a general undergraduate education. Yet the other departments could always outvote them, even on such vital matters as degree structure. Personal differences simply served to heighten this divergence over direction. By 1973 the economists had resolved to go it alone, and accordingly, the chairman of Economics proposed to the Board of Studies of the School of Social Sciences that a separate School of Economics be established.

Neither the Dean of Social Sciences, Professor H. A. Wolfsohn, nor the chairmen of the School's remaining departments were in the slightest way sympathetic to the proposal. An exhaustive School inquiry neither resolved the matter nor lessened the tenseness of the atmosphere. Eventually, the School's Board reported negatively to Academic Board on the issue, with the Department of Economics dissenting vigorously. The Board decided to refer the matter to the Advisory Committee on Academic Developments (ACAD), one of the many committees at one time or another concerned with long range planning at La Trobe. These
committees have all had short lives, and ACAD was no exception, but in this case ACAD performed a useful service. Largely through its efforts, some of the heat in the debate was diffused. A settlement was reached in 1974 in which, in return for the granting of greater flexibility in its degree structures, the Department of Economics agreed to postpone its pursuit of school status.

Nevertheless, the basic issues remained unresolved. In particular, the question of course development continued to cause friction, with the economists claiming that, despite some increased flexibility, the degree regulations of the School of Social Sciences prevented them from offering to their students the training available at other Victorian universities, and for which there was a demonstrably strong demand. Professor Donald Whitehead, of the Department of Economics was eventually asked to prepare a report for ACAD which would attempt to both quantify these assertions and also state the case for sub-dividing the present department into several smaller departments. This, too, was a development favoured by the Department of Economics, but opposed by the School's other members. Eventually, ACAD decided the matter had to be resolved one way or the other. It set up, therefore, its own sub-committee to investigate the issues and, eventually, to make recommendations on 'the future of Economics.'

The sub-committee deliberated for some months, before recommending that discussion on the proposal to form a separate School of Economics be 'deferred for the present' preferring if possible to deal with the issue through the liberalisation of the BEc degree structure within the School of Social Science's degree regulations. This approach however, was no longer remotely satisfactory to members of the Department of Economics, if, indeed, it ever had been. When, in July 1975, ACAD received a paper submitted by thirty members of the Department's staff insisting that a School of Economic and Financial Studies be established as the only possible way of settling the issue, members at last were prepared to agree, despite the continued objections of the three other departments in the School. These, however, were met in part by a concession on the part of the economists that students in the new School would still be able to take a minor sequence in Legal Studies, Politics and Sociology if they so wished. The impasse was now broken. In April 1976, ACAD recommended to the Academic Board that it 'approve in principle the formation of a School of Economic and Financial Studies', and that it establish 'a committee to consider all aspects concerned with the creation of the new School, including that of timing and the necessary changes in legislation.'

The committee was duly set up under the chairmanship of Professor H. J. McCloskey. It made certain recommendations as to the administrative and academic structure of the new School, it protected the interests of the remaining departments of the School of Social Sciences, it recommended that 'Financial Studies' be dropped from the School's title, and most important of all, it recommended that the School commence operating on January 1, 1977. All these recommendations were accepted and the School of Economics was at last born, the result of five years of, at times, heated argument and violent disagreement, as well as academic vacillation. It was not exactly an object lesson in crisp forward planning.

Much less divisive were the circumstances surrounding the formation of the School of Mathematical and Information Sciences though it, too, came about as a result of the division of one of the University's foundation schools, Physical Sciences. In late 1982, after several years of increasing financial strain and internal tension, it was decided that there should be a thoroughgoing review of the School of Physical Sciences with a view to making recommendations as to its future operations. This committee — the Strategic Planning Committee for the School of Physical Sciences as it was called — met in the second half of 1983 under the chairmanship of Professor J. W. Freebairn, eventually reporting in December. Its recommendations were far-reaching, with implications for all aspects of the School's program and administration, but easily the most controversial was that which suggested that the Departments of Mathematics and Computer Science form the nucleus of a new School of Mathematical and Information Sciences.
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Though there was initially some opposition to the recommendation it was soon overcome. The University Policy Advisory Committee (the successor to ACAD) quickly approved of the report’s main recommendations, and, indeed, its response formed the basis for Academic Board’s eventual acceptance of the new School’s formation. An implementation committee, chaired by Professor D.R.C. Marsh, worked throughout 1984 tidying up what loose edges remained, and the new School came into being on 1 January 1985, its relatively easy passage through the University’s several councils as much a tribute to the good sense of those responsible as the circumstances surrounding the creation of the School of Economics pointed to their occasional contrariness.

The creation of the University’s tenth school, Health Sciences, was neither the result of planned development or internal division, but arose from the merging of La Trobe University and the Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences. This development has been well covered elsewhere in this volume, and thus needs only the briefest discussion here. Informal negotiations between the two institutions became part of public debate in 1985. It would have to be said that the initial response from the University community was not overwhelmingly favourable; however the persistence of the Vice-Chancellor and the then-director of the Lincoln Institute, the painstaking attention to detail on the part of those committees charged with specifying the details of amalgamation, and the full and free debates held at the Academic Board all helped to allay fears. In 1986, the two institutions agreed in principle to merge from January 1, 1988. The year 1987, therefore, was one devoted to tidying up detail, resolving outstanding points of difference, and most important of all, completely restructuring the administration of both institutions — a process, incidentally, not without considerable human cost. Nevertheless, the amalgamation took place as planned, the Lincoln Institute becoming La Trobe’s tenth school, the Lincoln School of Health Sciences.

If the creation of new schools at the University has occurred in three ways, planned development, the division of existing schools, and finally, through amalgamation with an external institution, new departments have almost always been added as a result of forward planning, and usually without contention. Some schools have created them out of existing divisions within departments — the creation of Archaeology and Linguistics in the School of Humanities are good examples of this — but most have been built from scratch, following the appointment of a foundation professor, as part of the particular school’s natural expansion.

There has been one exception to this in the University’s history, and that surrounded the decision of the School of Social Sciences to establish a Department of Geography. Geography had often been talked about as a subject appropriate for that School, and an ACAD subcommittee created to investigate and make recommendations on the establishment of a department made a strong academic case in its favour in 1973. Nevertheless, it was clear that the School of Social Sciences as a whole was far from united on the proposition, the more so as the protracted discussions over the proposed School of Economics indicated that the department most strong in its advocacy of the new department could well shortly quit the School. Nevertheless, the School’s Board of Studies, after bitter debate, eventually endorsed the subcommittee’s recommendation by the narrowest of margins, with the solid support of the Department of Economics, and the backing of Board members from the Departments of History and Philosophy who were not ‘core’ members of the School. It was hardly the happiest of circumstances.

The proposal to establish a Department of Geography proceeded through ACAD, the Academic Board, and Council, despite the continued keen opposition of senior members of the School of Social Sciences. It was planned to begin teaching, first in 1975, (later revised to 1977), a foundation chair was advertised, a strong field was attracted, and an offer was duly made. After considerable delay, the first candidate declined; when the committee’s second choice also declined appointment, in June 1977, because the University had been unable to give him certain assurances as to the future development of his department, it was decided to re-evaluate the whole proposition.
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The reason for this, ostensibly, was financial. In the lengthy period between the original offer and the second refusal, the University's financial position had deteriorated so seriously that, in November 1976, all school reserves had to be recalled. In such a serious situation the University accepted the failure to fill the chair with something like relief. It took the School of Social Sciences' Board of Studies little time to recommend the postponement of any further moves to create the new department, and to recommend that, if financial circumstances permitted the establishment of geography in the future, the matter of its 'suitable location in the University' should be re-examined. The proposal has never again been raised, and though the primary cause for the abandonment in 1977 was clearly shortage of funds, it is equally clear that the dissension within the School was a strong underlying factor. As such, the story of geography at La Trobe illustrates how important it is to have a strong consensual base of support when attempting new developments.

Though the principle was clearly established that the creation of a new department, as in the abortive case of geography, required the consequent creation of a foundation professor who should lead the department for a substantial period of time yet, at the same time, the general role and function of professors was, in some minds at least, less certain. Professors were the academic leaders of their disciplines, traditionally they had also been the administrative leaders of their schools and departments, as the twin functions had been seen to be intertwined. This traditional pattern had been followed initially at La Trobe, yet by the mid 1970s it was being called generally into question. Few disputed the claim of the professor to academic leadership, but did it follow that he or she should also be the chairman or dean in perpetuity because of this? Were competent sub-professorial staff to be denied the chance to exercise their administrative skills — and at times indulge their ambitions — as a result? Were those professors who were reluctant administrators going to be forced to continue to fill the role? Were those few who, by their incompetence, had forfeited any right to future administrative leadership going to be, nevertheless, confirmed in office? Were, in short, the academic administrative structures going to become more flexible, more democratic, more accessible? The answer, by 1975, on the Arts side at least, was clearly yes. Non-professorial chairmen had been appointed, and some schools had adopted 'constitutions' ensuring the use of the elective principle wherever possible. Others, of course, had not. The lack of uniformity that had developed in University government as a result was one compelling reason for the establishment of a Committee of Inquiry into University Government (Reid Committee) in June 1977.

The background to the establishment of the Committee is bewilderingly complex. Indeed, the story of the successive reviews of University government could be said to have begun as early as November 1968, with the establishment of the Schools Structure Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor Warren Ewens. Its task was to review anomalies resulting from the differing degree structures of the various schools, a matter of particular concern to the Department of Mathematics, which taught students in all the existing Schools. The Committee reported in November 1969, having identified a series of problems which it believed could not be addressed unless and until the Academic Board had undertaken a thorough review of the existing system.

This the Board declined to do, thus the anomalies arising from differing degree structures continued. The next attempt to address these was not made until September 1972, when the Academic Board set up a Committee on Evaluation of the School Structure, with terms of reference sufficiently broad as to enable it to examine not only matters of structure, but matters of school and departmental government as well, should it choose to do so. Again, the invitation was declined, though the Committee continued in existence.

In November 1974, Dr R. Smith, an elected member of the Board, proposed that it appoint a widely representative sub-committee to examine 'the broad issue of University government.' The context of Dr Smith's recommendation was the growing tension in some areas of the University, especially between certain professors and their sub-professorial staff, over broad issues of power, including the elective principle, the rights of professors, and the role and
function of chairmen. The Academic Board, where this tension had also manifested itself in certain ways, declined to appoint such a sub-committee. Instead, it decided 'to refer the question of consideration of University government to the Committee on the Evaluation of the School Structure [CESS] and to request this Committee, in consultation with the Boards of Studies, to define the terms of reference in which it, or another committee, might consider the broad issues of University government, and to refer these findings to the Board'. In addition the Board agreed to advise Council of this decision, and to recommend that it should not itself initiate any action in relation to a review of University government, which it was threatening to do, until Academic Board had reported to it on the advice it received from the CESS. It was a holding, if not a delaying action, a triumph for those Board members most resistant to change.

There followed much activity on the part of the CESS and its various sub-groups, more related to the collecting of information on present practices than on drawing up blue-prints for the future. Indeed, in October 1975, the Board instructed it to proceed more expeditiously with its task, and in particular, to provide the Board by March 1976 with its descriptive report on current practices. Not until July did it do so, providing at the same time information on the variations between Schools 'in practices and decision making processes and, in many cases, lack of clearly defined duties and responsibilities of key academic staff.' School practices in key areas such as promotion, selection, and budgetary allocation were also found to be at variance with university procedures. CESS informed the Board that its review of University government would continue.

Its next report to Academic Board was not until June 1977. Its suggestions were lengthy and often detailed, as was its account of its procedures, but the key recommendations indicated their overall thrust. The Committee's first two recommendations were as follows:

(a) the University should set up a Committee of Enquiry into University Government and that this Committee should invite submissions from all interested members of the University Community;

(b) the Committee of Enquiry should, in the main, draw its personnel from the academic staff of the University.

Further, more detailed recommendations followed, including the notion that a senior academic be appointed chairman of the enquiry 'with a corresponding reduction in normal teaching and research duties.'

The CESS report resulted in a major Academic Board discussion on June 29, 1977, the final result of which was that the Board endorsed the general recommendation that a Committee of Enquiry into University Government be established. Its terms of reference, given the importance of the decision, are worth quoting in full. They were:

To inquire generally into the government of La Trobe University. Consideration should be given to such matters as:

(a) The role of departments (or divisions and centres in Schools which have no departments). This includes the status of recommendations of departmental meetings, the precise composition of departmental meetings, whether chairmen of departments should be elected and if so by whom, the role of departmental committees in formulating recommendations concerning, for example, course offerings, promotions and appointments, and the responsibilities and accountability of chairmen of departments.

(b) The role of professors. This includes such questions as whether professors should be expected to accept greater administrative responsibilities than non-professorial staff, whether chairmen and deans should normally be professors, and whether professors should play a special role in formulating departmental, school and University policy, and if so, what that special role should be.

(c) The role of deans. This includes such questions as how deans should be selected, their responsibilities and accountability, their relationship to the Board of Studies of their School, the function of a dean with regard to decisions by departments to their
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chairmen, and the relationship and responsibility of the deans to the Vice-Chancellor.

(d) The role of the Vice-Chancellor.

(e) The composition of Council, Academic Board, Boards of Studies and School meetings, their respective responsibilities and accountabilities and their inter-relationship and place in the general structure of the University.

These terms of reference held cloaked in the formality of their language the unresolved problems of University government at La Trobe, as well as the conflict between the traditional and the contemporary. In particular, the question of the administrative role of professors opened up the whole issue of the democratisation of University structures from top to bottom. The Committee thus had the opportunity to formalise the course towards democratisation that sections of the University had informally embarked upon or to recommend a return to more traditional academic structures. It was an awesome responsibility.

The Committee was formally constituted on 19 September 1977, not under the chairmanship of a senior member of the academic staff, as had been suggested, but with the recently-retired and widely-respected Foundation Dean of Agriculture, Emeritus Professor R. L. Reid, as its head. There were four academic staff members, Mr P. J. Bayne (Legal Studies), Professor J. S. Gregory (History), Dr G. C. O'Brien (Economics) and Dr M. J. O'Connor (Chemistry). Mr W. G. Philip, a prominent lawyer and a member of Council, was also appointed.

The 'Reid Committee', as it soon came to be called, met for nearly a year, more often than not in Professor Gregory's office. During that time it examined nineteen submissions and fifteen letters from interested groups and individual members of the University. It heard oral submissions from thirty-six members of staff and one student. Indeed, it met in total for forty-three working days, of itself an impressive statistic, evidence of the seriousness with which it approached its responsibilities.

Its final report, presented to the Academic Board in September 1978, was equally impressive. It had carried out its terms of reference admirably, for the sixty pages of the report contained a blueprint for the future, a coherent plan for University government which offered a way of resolving the major problems and tensions that had arisen over the years. To detail the Reid Committee's recommendations here is unnecessary. What has to be said, however, is that they resolved the problems of 'tradition vs democratisation' unequivocally in favour of the latter. The elective principle was firmly established at the departmental level, there were to be no more permanent chairmen, unless the department so wished. Secondly, academic and administrative leadership were separated, the Committee firmly asserting 'the chairmen and deans need not be of professorial rank', but that professors should be enabled to participate fully in the decision making processes. The elective principle, too, was introduced into the selection of deans. Furthermore, the reality of a 'Deans Committee' was finally recognised and codified. From the University's first days, one of its most powerful committees had had neither statutory nor regulatory existence. The deans, meeting regularly and informally, frequently took important decisions, or shaped future policies, without any legal sanction to do so. The Reid Committee ended this, giving to the Committee of Deans statutory recognition for the first time, giving it a structure, and a permanent chair in the person of the Vice-Chancellor. Not all were happy at the change, preferring the old, informal arrangement, but for most the bringing of the 'Deans Committee', fully into the area of academic scrutiny was a welcome and long overdue development. Since then, it has been subsumed into the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee.

The detailed recommendations of the Reid Report were, of course, various, but the two great principles of democracy and administrative devolution were plain enough for all to see, and were what lay in everyone's mind as it was debated at the departmental and School levels, and then, finally in 1979, at Academic Board. The debate was lengthy and, at times, bitter. Those who held strongly to the more traditional approach, who believed in professorial leadership in both the academic and administrative spheres, and who did not support the general-
ised application of the elective principle, fought a valiant rearguard stand. Certain recommendations were modified as a result and a few, for example that a Pro-Vice-Chancellor be appointed, were rejected. Yet it would have to be said that the outcome of the debate was a vindication of the work of Professor Reid and his colleagues. The University's structure was permanently democratised as a result, with administrative opportunities opened to a 'greater array of talent.' Non-professorial chairpersons and deans have become an unremarkable fact of life at the University and, though a few still doubtless mourn the passing of the 'god-professor', most agree that the change was entirely beneficial. The Reid Committee profoundly and permanently altered La Trobe's academic structures, and altered them for the better.

There is little else to add, and even less space to do it. Two developments of the 1980's, however, need a sentence or two. One concerns the growing awareness of the inequalities historically affecting women in Australian academic life, and the need to correct these. In terms of the academic structure, this has resulted in an insistence that women be represented on all the University's committees and governing institutions, even if it has meant altering their composition to do so, and this has generally been adhered to.

The second involved the acceptance, in 1987, of a Reid Report recommendation rejected in 1979. The University Policy Advisory Committee, in 1984 and 1985, again considered the question of appointing a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, eventually recommending that two such positions be created, both to be part-time, and both to be filled internally. One would have the responsibility of superintending the University's research activities, itself partly a recognition of the much closer controls now being imposed on these by bodies outside the University, particularly the federal government. The other would assist the Vice-Chancellor in various ways, including automatically taking over during his absence. Eventually UPAC's recommendations were accepted, the two positions were advertised internally, and Professors R.D. Topsom and D. E. Davies, both from the School of Physical Sciences, were appointed to the research and general positions respectively. The Pro-Vice-Chancellorships subsequently became full-time positions.

Academic structures at La Trobe University, then, have not remained static; how could they, when so much in the community La Trobe serves has been in flux. At times these changes have been resisted, or accepted grudgingly; given the conservative function of universities this is not necessarily to be deplored. Nevertheless they have occurred, and they have generally enabled the institution to perform its several roles more effectively in a changing environment. This paper has detailed but a few of the more important of these changes.