

Ballarat Courier
Thursday 23/07/2009
Page: 8
Section: General News
Region: Ballarat VIC, AU
Circulation: 18750
Type: Regional
Size: 452.52 sq.cms.



press clip

Social responsibility and the university

By **Professor David Battersby**

EVERY 10 years, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation convenes a world conference on higher education.

This year I was invited to attend as part of an Australian delegation to the conference, which was held in Paris during the second week of July. More than 1200 representatives from 150 countries — including several prime ministers, more than 60 education ministers, hundreds of diplomats and many noted academics — attended the conference.

As one of three Australian vice-chancellors to be invited to this important event, it was an opportunity to participate in the discussions and more particularly to showcase the University of Ballarat.

The key themes addressed at the conference related to the social responsibility of university education, the redevelopment of universities in Africa, internationalisation and globalisation, equity and access, and research and innovation.

There were hundreds of speeches delivered at the conference, some inspiring and many highly informative. What were some of the more interesting trends identified at the conference?

Probably the most surprising was the global expansion of universities, which is now occurring at a staggering rate. In 1980, for instance, there were 51 million university students worldwide. This number has now grown to 140 million who attend 15,000 universities.

More than three million university students are studying beyond their country's borders and by 2020 this number will be about eight million.

Women form the majority of

university students in most developed countries and their participation is increasing everywhere. The worldwide university student population is becoming more varied and international, with a much higher proportion of older and part-time students.

Of concern is that more than half of all academic staff worldwide are due to retire within the next 10 years and there is a significant shortfall of aspiring graduates to replace those university staff who are leaving. The situation is most acute in developing countries.

One of the concerns identified at the conference was a growing protectionism in the various systems of university education around the world.

In Europe, for instance, there is now a pan-European consortium, comprising 46 countries, which is striving to attain global dominance in terms of its fundamental model of what should constitute the framework for Bachelor, Master and PhD-level qualifications.

Among the highlights of the conference was an address delivered by Dr Jill Biden, the wife of the US vice-president, Joe Biden.

Dr Biden is a community college (TAFE) teacher. For the first time in US history, the wife of a serving vice-president has decided to continue with her day-time job.

She spoke of the importance of community colleges as a vital tool in rebuilding economies. As she indicated: "Generally, community colleges are able to serve non-traditional students, such as part-time students or recently laid-off workers who are looking to gain new skills."

The same situation

prevails in Australia with our TAFE institutes.

In her speech, Dr Biden said there were nearly 1200 community colleges in the US that catered to almost 12 million students, and these colleges had, in the past three decades, grown faster than most universities.

In her view, community colleges have the flexibility to offer classes that meet the immediate needs of industry in their communities.

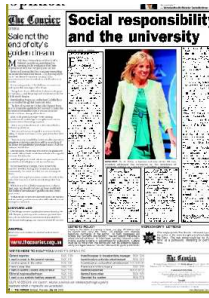
"I have always said that community colleges are one of America's best-kept secrets."

The UNESCO conference also provided an opportunity for student representatives from around the world to express their views. They argued strongly for the establishment of a global student organisation which could lobby on behalf of university students worldwide. The common view was that a globalised university system requires a global student response and voice.

The lasting impression from this once-in-a-decade event was that Australian universities, including the University of Ballarat, have an enviable reputation when a comparison is made with the other 15,000 universities around the globe.

We produce world-class graduates; our research is internationally competitive; and our focus on quality and standards is much respected.

● David Battersby is vice-chancellor of the University of Ballarat.



Ballarat Courier
Thursday 23/07/2009
Page: 8
Section: General News
Region: Ballarat VIC, AU
Circulation: 18750
Type: Regional
Size: 452.52 sq.cms.



slice
slicemedia.com

press clip
→



HIGHLIGHT: Dr Jill Biden, a teacher and wife of the US vice-president addressed the conference on the importance of community colleges as a vital tool in rebuilding economies.