

Demographic Profile

The title of the report, *A Demographic Profile of the Australian National University* (Santow and Bracher) is misleading in that the only information relating to women members of staff is provided in three paragraphs and one table (pp. 32-33). Dictionaries define demography as the science of vital and social statistics, illustrating the condition of communities. In her book *Introducing Population Statistics* Dr Norma McArthur points out that the three fundamental characteristics of any population are its size, its composition with respect to sex, and within this, its structure with respect of age. These represent the *minimum* requirements for an adequate description of a population. A more accurate title for the report might be *Implications of the age structure of ANU staff*.

Information relating to the sex of staff members was collected during the study (see p. 52, question 9; p. 54, question 9). As the authors are professional demographers we wonder why such information was not published? Such data would have made it possible to compare the 1982 situation of women in the University with that in 1975, using data from the Bramley and Ward report, *The Role of Women in the Australian National University* (1976). One recommendation of the Bramley and Ward report was that ANU make academic careers more visible for women. Unfortunately the *Demographic Profile...* continues to confer invisibility on women in the University.

We also take objection to the statement 'the higher representation of women in The Faculties may reflect the acceptance of teaching as a suitable profession for women' (p. 32). This seems to us not only patronising, but an inadequate examination of the possible reasons for this situation.

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Unfair Conditions

We, the undersigned research assistants (RAs) and research officers (ROs) employed at the ANU, wish to draw attention to unfairness in the conditions of employment for RAs and ROs.

RAs and ROs are classified as general staff, but are the *only* category of general staff not entitled as a matter of course to continuing appointment. Those who normally do receive continuing appointment

include secretaries, storemen, lab craftsmen, librarians, programmers, typists and technical officers. But many RAs in particular are kept on one-year appointments even after having been in a position for 5 or 10 years. Unlike other general staff, their job security is potentially at the whim of their superiors.

Regulations for obtaining continuing appointments for RAs and ROs are unsatisfactory. Approval is at the discretion of the appropriate Dean or Director, who potentially may be hostile to the person applying or to the subject or department in question.

In many ways RAs and ROs should be classified with academics rather than general staff. For example, RA and RO salaries are tied to academic salaries. But unlike tenurable academics, there are no formal appeal procedures for RAs and ROs against an unfavourable decision about continuing appointment.

Continuing appointment is different from and less secure than tenure. If RAs and ROs are considered to do academic work but cannot even obtain continuing appointment, this makes a mockery of the arguments for the tenure of academics based on protection of academic freedom. If RAs and ROs are not second-class general staff then they must be second-class academic staff.

The present system cannot be justified academically. Cuts in positions are not made on the basis of contributions to the academic community, but on the basis of vulnerability.

We realise that for projects of limited duration, or for positions designed for training, fixed term posts are suitable. Otherwise, continuing appointment should be a reasonable expectation. Appeal procedures should be provided for all decisions affecting jobs. When financial or other pressures require cutbacks, these should be made using redundancy procedures and on the basis of academic criteria.

While we have mainly been concerned here about continuing appointment for RAs and ROs, we also recognise and give our support to others with related difficulties, such as tutors and part-time staff.

Peta Dawson CRES

Cheryl Hannah RSPacS

(50 other signatures sighted—ed.)

Going Grey Together

So the ABC, like the ANU, is going grey (22nd July 'Reporter'). For some of those caught up in the innards of these ageing organizations, however, the similarities end there. We read that an ABC programmer in his thirties notes the changing times with

wonder, a mild emotion with little place in the world inhabited by his contemporaries who are Research Fellows in the ANU Research Schools. He can be reasonably diligent and mark time until opportunities arise: they know that irrespective of the quality of the contribution they are making their limited-term contract will very likely have forced them on to a non-existent job market, and effectively out of their profession, before then.

Leaving aside the question of how kindly ABC staff would take such treatment, it is difficult to see how the ANU can continue to regard this as the most effective use of its resources. It will be instructive to compare the humanity and success with which each organization eventually rejuvenates itself.

(Name and address supplied but withheld by request)

Smallpox and Aborigines

According to a recent issue of your publication, Professor Butlin suggests in his book titled *Our Original Aggression* that Aborigines might have been intentionally infected in 1789 and 1829 with live variolous matter kept for inoculation purposes. This statement does not seem very historical in view of the following.

Jenner did not invent the vaccine until 1796, when he used it for the first time to prove that it worked. It was not used widely until a few years later. In any event, the vaccine was cowpox-based, cowpox being an animal disease that only produces minor lesions in the hands of people who have frequent contact with affected cows. It was from the fluid of such lesions, obtained directly from the hands of a milkmaid, that the first vaccine was made.

The modern microbial theory of disease was not proposed until the 1860s by Pasteur. The first vaccine from weakened forms of the then still invisible viruses was not developed until 1885 by Pasteur himself to prevent rabies.

So, how come?

P. Kane

Higgins ACT

P. Kane has raised a question about the origin of smallpox in Australia. Variolation was by live smallpox virus. Jenner's vaccine was derived from cowpox. The first smallpox epidemic preceded Jenner and was related to cowpox. It might be noted that I did not suggest that the 1829 epidemic was likely to have been deliberate though the 1789 incident is quite likely to have been.

N. Butlin

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