Simon Marginson and Mark Considine, *The Enterprise University. Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, xiv + 272 pp, $34.95 paperback, $99.00 hardback

Reviewed by Don Aitkin

This is a very good book indeed, penetrating in its analysis, firmly based on recent empirical work and measured in its tone, which makes it a refreshing change from some of the recent books on our world of higher education. Anyone who works in a university will find the book full of interesting and enlightening material. Although the empirical work — a series of interviews of senior university people from 17 Australian universities — was carried out in the mid 1990s, the general thrust of the argument has only been strengthened by what has happened since.

In summary, Marginson and Considine argue that all Australian universities are now 'Enterprise Universities', concerned to find money out in the world so that they can survive. This process has involved greater or lesser amounts of institutional reinvention, the adoption of many practices that are common in business enterprises, and the decline in power of the 'traditional' academic disciplines. Vice-chancellors and those who surround them are now more powerful figures, Councils are becoming more like the boards of corporations, and academic boards have shrunk in size and in power. There is a present and growing need to find new meanings for identity, culture and autonomy within the contemporary university.

I think they have got it about right, and while what follows in this review is largely argumentative (because I don't they have it completely right!), I should emphasise that their analysis had me nodding my head in agreement again and again. They seem to me to have placed John Dawkins properly in the story of the last fifteen years, to understand the nature and limitations of executive power, and to know how to compare and contrast these awkward and slippery things we call universities. Although my own place was not part of the 17, and I was not interviewed for it (in fact, I think I was an ARC assessor for the grant application which funded the empirical work), many of the verbatim quotes could have been things I have said. Since all of us know our own university best, to read a book like this one, which scans a dozen and a half at the same time, is a sobering experience. I am deeply impressed by the evidence about how far and how fast the move toward the Enterprise University has gone.

My principal concern with the book is its uncertain sense of history. What I see as deficiencies here do not invalidate the central argument, but point towards a rather different explanation for what has certainly occurred. The weakness is a familiar methodological one. The two authors would no doubt like to have provided us with a kind of panel study, in which they interviewed essentially the same office-holders at two points in time ten or fifteen years apart. Alas, as so often in the social sciences, they were able to do the second but not the first. So we know what all these people thought was the case in 1996 or 1997, but not what they or their predecessors thought was the case in the early or mid 1980s.

Now there's no doubt that things have changed a lot, but when did the changes start? When you have a couple of unmistakably powerful events, like the Green and White Papers of 1987/88 and the Howard Government's Budget of 1996, it is tempting to see these events as having had almost universal effect. But since I not only lived through all of that, but started my preparation for university not quite 50 years ago, I often see continuity and change in different terms to those employed by Marginson and Considine. The last half-century, for universities no less than our nation, has been a time of continuing change; it didn't start with John Dawkins.

Let me give some examples. 'Once universities were able to temper the effects of sudden changes and deflect many of its pressures (p. 96)'. When was that? I can't think of such a time myself. The first AVCC paper to talk of a 'crisis' in the university system was back in the 1940s, and we've gone from one 'crisis' to another ever since. Since we've survived them all, perhaps the word 'crisis' is too strong (it's certainly been over-used and not just by universities).   And to talk of 'mass enrolment' in the late 1950s (p. 108) is to extend present conditions back much too far. University enrolments in 1957 were less than 40,000, compared with more than 700,000 today.   The 1980s and 1990s saw a 'reduced capacity to carry out … community service (p. 13)'. Really? Compared to when? In my judgment, universities are vastly more involved in community service now than they have ever been; indeed, community service (which irritates quite a few academics, who feel it is irrelevant to their real work) is part of the reinvention that the authors rightly comment on.   And when did university Councils have a 'community-forming role' from which they are now retreating (p. 243)?   I have been a member of the Councils of three universities at different times for much of the past 40 years, and community-forming, either internally or externally, has not been to the fore in any of them. It is certainly true, however, that today's Councils think and act in much more businesslike ways than was true in the 1960s and 70s.

My unease with the history was greatest in the authors' treatment of research. Now I think that the author's assessment of our present reality is spot on. But when they compare today with the past I often shook my head. Public funding of the research that academics want to do has been in existence for barely 35 years, although the first injection of money to support research infrastructure came a very few years before that. Universities developed a strong research culture quickly, nonetheless, and that spread into the colleges of advanced education, even though they were explicitly not funded for that activity. Had it not been so RMIT could not have won a Special Research Centre in open competition in the mid 1980s and the CRCs which dot the landscape would not be where they currently are (my own university is the HQ of one and a senior academic partner in another). In contrast to the authors, who see all this as quite recently, I would argue that since the mid 1960s research grants have always been ends in themselves, grants have always begotten new grants, research has always been the principal path to honour, and we never did value research for its outcomes — grants have always been proxies for real value. Indeed, I gave a speech in England in 1990 saying just this. The three biases which the authors discern as outcomes of the Enterprise University's worry about how to manage

risk in research — biases towards quantity rather than quality, towards short-term rather than long-term, and towards track record rather than potential — were all things that the members of the ARGC of the early 1980s worried about. No doubt members of even earlier ARGCs worried about them too.

This uncertainty about the past bobs up continually when the authors consider 'autonomy'. They think (p. 20) that the paradox of deregulation is that universities have less autonomy, meaning that that they have to compete with one another, and therefore all have to operate as market-oriented organisations. But that isn't what autonomy is about: it means independence of government, and there is no doubt that in this sense we are more independent than we used to be. I don't think the authors ever quite decide what they mean by autonomy. How independent should universities be, anyway? How much should the people who pay the piper be entitled to name the tune? When did universities have 'a broad role in public culture' (p. 37)? What's the evidence? These are all important questions if you are going to talk about autonomy. Every now and then a grim picture emerges of a government determined to control universities at every level. While government has stopped overt regulation of universities and pulled out some of its money 'at the same time it is using more subtle and severe methods to shape their inner life' (p. 175). Really? Who is doing this? David Kemp? Mike Gallagher? Come off it! Surely the reality is that universities are now much freer to do what they like, freer to make mistakes, and freer to write their own scripts. People who think otherwise have forgotten the sort of control that CTEC used to have.

So where does all this get us? I think that Marginson and Considine have portrayed the present in an accurate and enlightening way, and they are right to argue that the 1990s have been a period of great change. But I think they attribute too much of what they see to political changes in the late 1980s and mid 1990s. I think that a lot of this would have happened anyway, whether or not Dawkins and Vanstone and Howard had pulled the levers. Much of what Australian higher education has experienced in this time has happened elsewhere, at much the same time. I think that they need to add the increasing scale of the system into their analysis. Very generally, the present higher education system is some 30 times larger than it was when I was an undergraduate in the early 1950s (15 or so times larger if we correct for the doubling of our population). The system is also twice as large as it was in the mid 1980s.

The universities have had to change, everywhere. The 'traditional' academic disciplines, most of them creations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, have given way to newer bodies of thought, creations of the second half of the 20th century. I have no doubt that there is a flock of even newer ones coming in the early 21st century. There has been at least a doubling of higher education enrolments throughout the world in the last decade. University presidents, rectors, vice-chancellors have grown in power and responsibility everywhere. Australia is not at all unique in its experience, though we parochially and habitually attribute a great deal to the actions or inaction of our governments.

I know that the authors will feel as though they are being criticised for not having written a different book. But judgments involve comparisons, and comparisons involve (in this case) a sound knowledge of the past. No one has written a good history of Australian higher education, and I'm not suggesting that these authors should have done so as part of their brief. Yet the lack of one has been a real problem for them.

Let me finish with a few scattered comments. As those who have read his earlier work will know, Simon Marginson is fond of classifications. Those who have the same liking will enjoy this book, for it presents three, of universities, academic leaders, and models of devolution and integration in research management. That I didn't find them very useful probably says more about me than about the various schema. For what it's worth, I find about as much variation within universities as I do between them, which the authors also say somewhere. But I did like their accurate and somewhat sardonic view of the 'Sandstone' universities. They see the present pattern of privilege as being there for the long haul, and I might agree, but I can see that my 'long term' is a good deal longer than theirs is. I can remember when there wasn't a UNSW, and its predecessor was called 'Kenso Tech' by those who thought that there was only one real university in Sydney. So my sense of what is likely to happen is that there will be a spreading out of value and reputation. The 'Sandstones will not be dislodged; they will just have to make room, as they have done progressively since the first postwar foundations.

The Enterprise University is a good read, even if the authors use the polysyllabic brush too much (I did get tired of 'isomorphistic' and just shook my head at 'simulacra exposed'). If you want to understand the university you work in, and why it is that way, and what you can do about it, and why you should bother, this well-researched, well-written and well-produced book is a great place to start.