

UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT IN CANBERRA

Statement by the Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies.

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Cabinet has devoted much time to resolving the question of the future of the Canberra University College. Should it be given full and independent University status or should it be organically associated with the Australian National University? We have decided in favour of association.

Mindful of the importance of self-government in University institutions, we have not attempted to work out any details. We are inviting both institutions to co-operate in preparing a plan which will serve as a basis for association in one university, with one over-all governing body, one series of degrees and, as far as is practicable, a common administration.

As this decision is one of great moment for those concerned, I think it proper to set out as succinctly as possible some of the major considerations which have led us to our conclusion. We have had close and prolonged ministerial discussion. I have personally had consultations with representatives of the A.N.U. and C.U.C. Their views favoured separate development, and have, of course, been carefully weighed. When I was in London earlier this year, I discussed the problem with Sir Keith Murray, whose committee on Australian Universities had left this matter open, though with some broad indication of its approach. More recently, I invited the newly-appointed Australian Universities Commission, under the Chairmanship of Sir Leslie Martin, to give its opinion.

In the result, the views which Cabinet had tentatively formed are supported by those of Sir Keith Murray and of the Universities Commission.

In its celebrated report the Murray Committee said that "It clearly is a matter for very serious consideration whether there should be in so small a centre of population two quite independent universities". Later the Committee said:

"It should be possible, in our view, to devise a form of constitution giving to the College all the independence in operation which both the National University and the College desire and yet making it possible for students at the College to receive degrees of the National University and for common services to be organized and maintained without unnecessary duplication. Such a constitution for a university would be a new thing in Australia; but there are patterns of various types in universities overseas which might well be studied and we think it should not pass the wit of man to devise constitutional arrangements which might suit the situation in Canberra in a manner which would be acceptable to all concerned".

In conversation with me in London, Sir Keith developed very strongly his belief that two universities could not be justified. The principal reasons for this opinion - reasons which have commended themselves to the Cabinet - are, first, that it would be difficult to justify the creation of two universities in Canberra with a population of around 40,000 at a time when efforts to create second universities in Sydney and Melbourne are, in the case of Sydney, by no means completed and, in the case of Melbourne, largely at the 'paper stage'. Where, as in Australia at the present time, there is a marked and nation-wide pressure for more universities, care must be taken to devote the available resources to the best advantage from an Australia-wide point of view. Second, if the C.U.C. is to

become a separate university and is not to be a second-rate university, it cannot stop at first degrees - it must cater for post-graduate studies. Above all it must provide facilities for research, and such facilities are increasingly costly. The consequence of this is that a separate and properly developed Canberra University would, to an extent, duplicate the Australian National University at the post-graduate stage or would need, at that stage, to become organically associated with the A. N. U.

At a later stage, I consulted the newly-formed Australian Universities Commission, a body especially created to co-ordinate the work of the universities and to examine their financial requirements. On October 21, I received a report from Sir Leslie Martin, the material portion of which is as follows :

" The Commission has considered this problem, with a knowledge of the facts and views recently put before Cabinet, and has unanimously concluded that some form of association is both desirable and practicable. Further, Commissioners believe that if the concept of association is accepted it can be more easily achieved now than later.

It should be possible for a form of association to be worked out by a committee consisting of representatives of the Australian National University and the Canberra University College during the next twelve months. Presumably such a committee would have before it full details of distinguished and successful forms of association between research institutes and universities elsewhere, e.g., Chicago, Columbia, Harvard and Princeton.

Before reaching its decision to recommend in favour of association, the Commission gave some thought to the means by which this could be achieved. It seems to the Commission essential that there should be one institution, to be called the Australian National University, and that it should have one Council, with a Vice-Chancellor as its chief executive officer."

The Commission went on to indicate diagrammatically certain suggested forms of organisation which I have conveyed to the two bodies concerned.

We are aware of a view current in the A. N. U. that that body should, to achieve its true position in Australian University life, be related and have duties to all Australian universities and not just to one. Our reply is that the fact of amalgamation in Canberra would not mean that the highly specialised researchers of the A. N. U. would not be available to State Universities or that there could not be effective exchange of research workers between all. We are quite aware of the fact that there are some highly specialised investigations conducted at the A. N. U. which could not be sensibly interrupted by the routine teaching of undergraduates. But as we all know, teaching and exposition have great value in clarifying the mind and in actually testing conclusions already tentatively arrived at. It may turn out to be extremely useful for courses of lectures to advanced honours' students, for example, to be delivered by some of the great and world-famous experts in the Australian National University as it is today constituted. We feel also that if the University is to achieve its greatest results, not only in the granting of degrees but in the stimulation of the mind, there will be enormous advantage for students with a bent towards research to have the great advantage of contact with men of great eminence in their own field.

In short, we have made our decision for association because we believe that together and as one institution the National University and the College will offer to Australia in the next generation more than they can hope to offer separately. It is not our intention that this decision should interfere with the work being carried on by either body or prejudice the proper exercise of responsibility by those who deal with graduates or undergraduates. We are quite confident that the two bodies together will work out a plan which will preserve the interests of workers in both and provide an organisation which will enable them to co-operate fully for the benefit of both.

The working out of the necessary arrangements will take some time. It cannot be done in a hurry. Our decision means that the new association will operate by the beginning of 1961.

As the current arrangements with the University of Melbourne, which has nurtured the welfare of the Canberra University College for a quarter of a century, were due to terminate at the end of 1959, I requested the Council of the University of Melbourne to extend its affiliation for one year, that is, until the end of 1960. That Council has most generously decided to extend its legislation relating to Canberra University College until the end of 1960. I am indeed most grateful for this decision, which will enable the scheme of association to be formed without undue pressure, though it must be brought to finality in good time.

CANBERRA,  
17th December, 1959.