

activity is needed. To say that the Ministry is “pushing hard to go all the way to a single multi-purpose system” is of course, untrue as far as data on universities is concerned.

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Bernard Trotter and Mario Creet reply:

Our purpose was to raise broader questions than Mr. Wilson has addressed; namely, what kinds of information are useful for policy and planning whether in a provincial or a national context. However, as Mr. Wilson has focussed on current practice in Ontario, we shall restrict our observations similarly. And we thank him for the opportunity of up-dating our analysis by referring to events which have occurred during the year since we completed the paper in July, 1977.

A central part of our argument was that there is a tension between the data requirements of financial administration and the information needed for policy and planning. We observed that pre-occupation with the former was tending to squeeze out the latter, and that policy makers and planners were likely to get short shrift. Mr. Wilson denies that there is any conflict in theory or in practice. We will confine ourselves to three examples drawn from recent events which will illustrate three different facets of the conflict and show how planners and policy makers have lost ground.

1. The misplaced “part-time” enrolment.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities has published for each year since 1972/73 a statistical summary of enrolments in, and financial support of, post-secondary institutions in Ontario. The summary for 1976/77 is now in the process of preparation. Table 1B of the draft shows the series for part-time enrolments, separately for the colleges and the universities. The university totals for 1975/76 and 1976/77 are given as 22,072.1 and 19,660.2 respectively, and a footnote runs as follows: “Figure for 1976 undergraduates is estimated by multiplying total fall-term fiscal FTEs x 2 less 1 FTE per full-time student.” The footnote needs some decoding. The fiscal full-time equivalent (FFTE) is a figure computed by aggregating all the course registrations in a program for one term and dividing by the full-time course load imputed to the program, thus arriving at a full-time-equivalent figure which includes both full- and part-time students indiscriminately. Doubling this figure converts it into an equivalent for the academic year (1 FTE = 2 FFTE). To arrive at the part-time component, the portion attributed to the full-time component is subtracted from the aggregate FTE. The assumption underlying the latter operation is that a full-time student is exactly 1 FTE, despite the contrary evidence produced in Mr. Wilson’s letter (the drift in course loads, presumably for a BA program, from 5.00 to 4.86). There are several points to notice. The example displays the Ministry’s concern with achieving precision in accounting. It shows how this preoccupation has led to a construction which clouds rather than clarifies the situation for other purposes. For example, other information obtained directly from the universities indicates that the drop in part-time enrolment from

1975/76 to 1976/77 was only about half the amount shown in the table in question. Above all, it provides evidence that information on trends, which is particularly important to planners and policy makers, ranks below the data needed for financial control.

2. *A loss of timeliness.*

The need for current enrolment information as early as possible each fall scarcely needs justification. In recent years, a standard source in Ontario of enrolments by program has been the reports submitted by each university to the Ministry. Until now, these have been "hard copy" aggregated reports accessible to any interested persons. In 1977/78 they were produced concurrently with magnetic tapes containing only coded details. From now on, the tapes are to replace the "hard copy" reports. Hence, a user who wishes system information by program must either arrange to collect it directly from each institution or wait until the Ministry produces print-outs at the end of the academic year. This is a real loss of service to planners and policy makers.

3. *The vanishing future.*

Reports to the Ministry have also served as collection points for longer-term projections of enrolment prepared by the universities. Initially, the Ministry's interest stemmed from the use of such projections in the administration of the capital support formula. When this procedure fell into abeyance with capital for new buildings being cut back sharply, the impetus for collecting planning information diminished. And it has now reached the point where the Ministry no longer wants enrolment projections and is not prepared to collect them for other users. As persons concerned with planning, our interest in such figures (with all their acknowledged faults) has been, and continues to be, to read them as quantitative indicators of the ambitions, expectations and intentions of the institutions at one point in time, and definitely not as predictors of the future or any other sort of "hard" data. On the other hand, the Ministry has tended to treat them as bases for administrative action, for which they are now of little use. In other words, the Ministry neither shares our view of planning nor believes in accommodating what may be our idiosyncrasy by providing the service of collecting and distributing the requisite information.

These three examples do not exhaust the shortcomings for policy and planning purposes of the information system now being put in place by the Ministry. We acknowledge that there may be operational gains associated with the present course and they should be pursued. Our point is that gains of this sort should not be made at the expense of users whose perspective is that of planning and policy making. The message we want to convey to Mr. Wilson (and other policy makers) is that we are on his (their) side; our aim has been, and is, to caution such persons against uncritical acceptance of the claims and actions of technical experts who are predisposed to put technical feasibility before broader questions of purpose and economy. And consultation of Ministry experts with their counterparts at the universities tends only to reinforce the technical orientation.

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