

“From the (Acting) Director’s Desk”

From the Director’s Desk is conventionally a report about the activities of the Institute of Criminology in recent months, and about our future plans. As I compile that report it seems that it is also an important time to reflect on the broader context in which this Institute of Criminology operates, and more generally about the factors which shape criminology in Australia, in all its manifestations.

The future of criminology in Australia is under threat on at least two fronts — the Federal Government’s recent decision to slash \$1.5 million from the budget of the AIC is the first and most direct attack on criminological research. The second, and less public front, is that related to higher education and the funding of universities.

Opposition by the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology, and lobbying by Australian and international criminologists have failed to protect the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) from substantial cuts to its budget, and the likely erosion of its independence. Procedures are underway to shed the equivalent of 20 full time positions from the staff. It is reported that the AIC is to be given greater direction by the government in setting research priorities, and that it will be required to focus particularly on strategies for ‘fighting’ organised crime.

The inclusion of the AIC under a review of law enforcement agencies was in itself surprising, and suggests a disturbingly narrow conception of the role of the AIC and of the nature of criminology. The direction to focus on organised crime is arguably less likely to deliver genuine crime prevention, if that is what the government is seeking, than more broadly conceived research which recognises economic and social marginality as central to the experiences of both offenders and victims of crime. It remains to be seen to what extent the AIC is able to develop a broad, independent and critical role in research given the conditions under which it will be required to operate.

The second and less obvious attack on criminological research results from Federal government higher education policies. The funding formulae used to allocate funding to University Faculties places Law and Arts, the two faculties in which criminology is most likely to be housed, at a significant disadvantage by comparison with other faculties, and has seen those faculties suffer significant cuts in funding over recent years. Coupled with the new managerialism which pervades the tertiary education sector, this reduction in funding has resulted in an increasing reliance on outside funding to maintain teaching and research in the area of criminology. Increasingly we are exhorted to shape our endeavours to make them more marketable to the private sector, and we are encouraged to maximise the fees we charge our students. Precious research time is expended instead in fund raising and marketing. And research funding is shrinking as the government gives priority to research with export earning potential.

At a time when Australian criminology is particularly vital, and well regarded internationally, we face the reality of substantially reduced funding.

At the Institute of Criminology we are making adjustments in response to shrinking sources of funds but have maintained our commitment to this journal as paramount. The journal has a growing reputation, a healthy and improving subscription base and is attracting high quality articles from Australia and beyond.

In addition to this journal, one of the significant achievements of the Institute of Criminology has been the establishment of the electronic noticeboard called CrimNet by which information can be exchanged within Australia or internationally through electronic mail. CrimNet has subscribers from Australia, Canada, Israel the United Kingdom and the United States. Details about how to access CrimNet are included in the Current Events section of this issue.

Much of our work in recent months has related to domestic violence. The Institute held a very successful public seminar in March which featured Michael Paymar from the Duluth Domestic Intervention Program in the United States. I also participated in three conferences dealing with domestic violence: *Challenging the Justice System's Response to Domestic Violence* (in Brisbane), the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies conference *Speaking Out* (University of Sydney) and the New South Wales Ministry for the Status and Advancement of Women conference. The next monograph in the Institute of Criminology Monograph Series, which is also on the theme of domestic violence and is called *Women, Male Violence and the Law*, is currently in press and will be launched in the near future.

Julie Stubbs
Acting Director