PROFILE

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Few academics can truly claim to have had a role in the creation of a university, yet that is one achievement that Professor Ken Bowman is able to list on his résumé. When the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) was established through a process of redefining the role of its precursor institution, the Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT), and amalgamation with another institution, Ken Bowman was one of a small core group that had direct input into the shape and character of the new university.

The late 1980s was a time of upheaval and controversy in the Australian higher education sector. Ultimately, the existing 19 universities and 46 Colleges of Advanced Education were consolidated into 35 universities under a Unified National System of Higher Education. Queensland Institute of Technology was redesignated as Queensland University of Technology in 1989 and then merged in 1990 with the Brisbane College of Advanced Education (BCAE) to create one of Australia's major universities with 40,000 students and a rapidly developing research presence.[1]

The events surrounding those consolidations in the university sector also had a major impact on the academic career of Professor Ken Bowman. As well as having a


major involvement in the changes within QUT at that time, Ken then took up significant leadership and managerial roles within the university, the first optometric academic to do so at those levels in Australia. His influence both on subsequent developments within his university and on the national and state health care sectors has been wide-ranging and effective.

How did an optometrist come to have such a broad-ranging career in academia?

From Melbourne to Paris

Ken Bowman always had an aptitude for science but he was also attracted to the various health-care professions, including optometry. He credits a discussion with Professor Barry Cole after a careers interview at The University of Melbourne as cementing his choice of optometry for a career.

Ken graduated from the optometry program at The University of Melbourne in 1970. His was one of the earliest of the larger classes to graduate. In common with many students in that era, he spent his summer vacations at the large optometry firm, Coles and Garrard, much of that time in the lens-grinding section. He considered the option of further studies after he graduated but instead joined Coles and Garrard. He was moving steadily up the ladder of corporate optometry in the firm but clearly something was missing because Ken applied for and obtained a French Government scholarship to study in France in 1974. After some intensive French language courses (he retains good skills in French today), Ken moved with his wife Annette and young family to Paris to take up his scholarship. With the approval of its eminent Director, Professor Yves Le Grand, he conducted colour vision research at the Laboratoire de Physique, Museum National D'Histoire Naturelle. He returned to Coles and Garrard but the experience in France had stimulated his interest in academic pursuits—he was ready for other challenges. In 1975 he
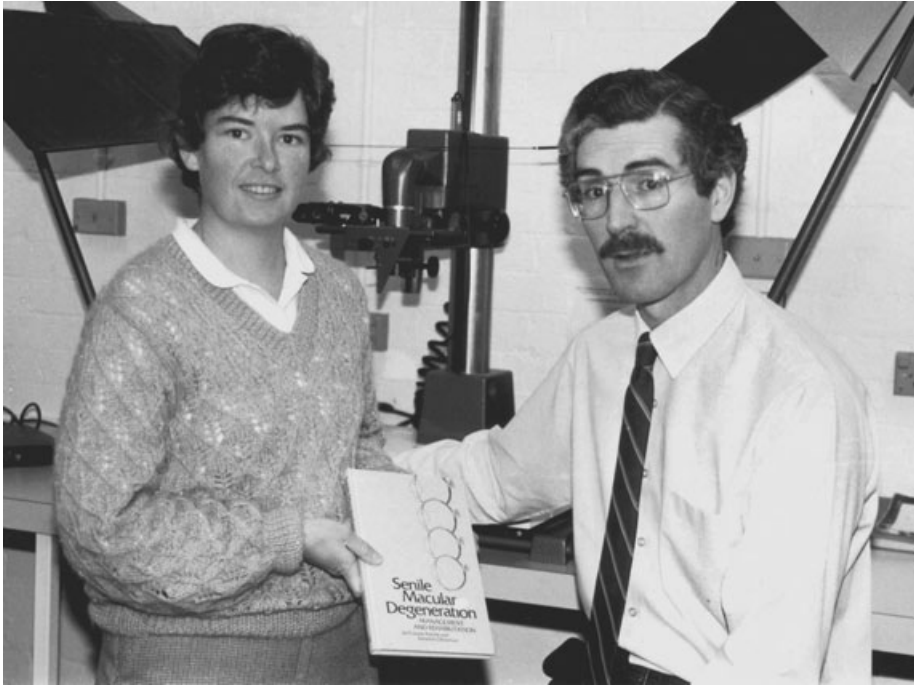
Jan Lovie-Kitchin and Ken Bowman with their book *Senile Macular Degeneration: Management and Rehabilitation,* **published in 1985**

joined the Victorian College of Optometry (VCO) as a Senior Clinical Associate and in 1976 he was a temporary lecturer in the Department of Optometry at The University of Melbourne.

At the VCO, Ken Bowman was Director of the Contact Lens Clinic and a consultant optometrist at the low vision clinic of the Association for the Blind. He was a Research Fellow in the Visual Ergonomics Laboratory of Professor Barry Cole, working on aviation issues funded by the Australian Department of Civil Aviation.

Having grown up as the eldest child in a family that operated its own business, Ken was long accustomed to conversations about the financial and management strategies needed for a successful business. During his time at the VCO, Ken started to hone some of his own management and fund-raising skills, which were so much in evidence in his later QUT days.

Emergence of a new optometry course at QIT

The late 1970s was a time of conflict and uncertainty in Queensland optometry. Optometric education in Queensland was provided through a three-year Diploma course at QIT. The national office of the Australian Optometrical Association (AOA), together with many in the Queensland Division of the AOA, was focused on upgrading the optometry course to a four-year degree course. The optometry courses in The University of Melbourne and the University of New South Wales were four-year degree courses and had been for some 20 years in NSW and 30 years in Melbourne. QIT was initially unresponsive to upgrading its optometry course and the federal and state associations explored the possibility of a bachelor's degree in optometry at Griffith University, a new university established in 1971, located in the southern outskirts of Brisbane. QIT did not want to

lose the high profile optometry course and it had the support of others in the profession. From the safe distance of 30 years, the events of that time could be considered as some of the more colourful in the history of optometric education in Australia.

The outcome of all of this was that the optometry course remained at QIT but became a four-year Bachelor's degree. It is not possible to say if the other options for optometry education in Queensland would have been better; it is clear that over the next decades the Queensland optometry course has been the match of any Australian program.

Before the new degree program became a reality, Mr Noel Verney, the Head of the Optometry Section, died suddenly after many years of leadership in Queensland optometry.[2] The search for his replacement eventually became a major opportunity for Ken Bowman. QIT had been unsuccessful in appointing a new Head, when Owen J Wordsworth, the Director of QIT, met with Professor Barry Cole in Melbourne. Professor Cole had recognised Ken Bowman's leadership and managerial abilities and suggested that QIT might approach Ken Bowman about the position when it was advertised. In 1981, at the young age of 34, Ken Bowman became the Foundation Head of the Department of Optometry at QIT, a position he held until the events of 1990 opened up new opportunities and new challenges.

Optometry at QIT

On taking up his appointment as Head of Department, Ken Bowman recognised that there were some immediate needs of his department. He needed to build up his academic staff, enhance the curriculum, work on the department's infrastructure and develop its research potential.

He was very aware of the need for constructive engagement from the department with the profession and the AOA. To that end, he introduced regular meetings with Heather Waldron, President of the Queensland Division of the AOA. He firmly believed that, while the academic and political arms of the profession might have differing objectives from time to

time, it was essential that in general they worked co-operatively.

The staff that he gathered around him provided the platform for the department's growth over the next decade. Peter Swann had joined QIT earlier from the UK; Jan Lovie-Kitchin[3] and later David Atchison[4] were recruited from Melbourne (Jan started at QIT on the same day as Ken), Christine Wildsoet, Michael Collins, Jennifer Bevan and Kel Cameron were all QIT graduates and Brian Brown was recruited from the Smith-Kettlewell Institute in San Francisco with the specific role of building up the research program of the department. Brian had visited QIT on study leave and obviously saw good potential as he later took the opportunity to join QIT full-time. This core group supported Ken in the growth in stature of the department throughout the 1980s.

Optometry's standing within QIT was engineered by Ken Bowman in large part through his skill at recognising opportunities, exploiting timidity by others and stepping around barriers to growth. This was to be repeated later at a university level with the Faculty of Health. In reflecting on those times, Professor Dennis Gibson, a previous Vice-Chancellor at QUT and now Chancellor of RMIT University, believed that Ken 'ran the best department in QIT and was an outstanding head'.[5]

During this time the research potential of optometry at QIT was first developed. While research was not prohibited at QIT, it was not seen as a primary objective. Nevertheless, Ken actively encouraged research in his department—he considered that this was a fundamental expectation of an academic discipline. As a product of the Melbourne Department of Optometry, he had a healthy respect for the importance of research to the progress of his profession. There was an early emphasis on clinically relevant research at QIT and on working in teams. His staff published well and funding for research began to grow from both competitive research grants and consultancies. When QIT moved to bolster its research through the creation of Centres of Excellence, optometry was ideally placed—the Centre for Eye Research, with Ken Bowman as

Director, was one of the first three centres created by QIT in 1988. The substantial core funding available through this initiative provided a further major impetus to optometry's research. Ken's own research included the publication of a well-received book on the management of age-related macular degeneration, co-authored with Jan Lovie-Kitchin. He also worked with several of the research teams he had established, sharing authorship in publications across a diversity of topics including abnormal colour vision, effects of age on vision and contact lenses. His scoring method for the Panel D15 colour vision test was widely adopted internationally.

The manager

As the changes to the Australian higher education sector initiated by the then Minister for Education, John Dawkins, in the late 1980s unfolded, new opportunities opened up at the new QUT. The amalgamations that were occurring required careful attention to detail and good negotiating skills, areas of strength for Ken. He would have been a very good poker player. He was directly involved in many of the decisions required of the new university and in the redesignation of academic units to new faculties. In effect, he was one of a small group of people involved in the creation of the new institution. He took on the role of Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research for several months, a difficult assignment at a time of change. He had responsibility for the reorganisation and development of the university's Office of Research, its Office of Commercial Services, its international activities and its other external programs.

The changes within the new university led to changes in management positions and the creation of a new group of academic managers. Ken Bowman was appointed as Foundation Dean of the Faculty of Health, a position he still occupies as Executive Dean. The faculty at that time had four schools (Human Movement Studies, Nursing, Optometry and Public Health) and a fifth (Psychology and Counselling) was added later. Ken set about the development of the new faculty using the same emphases which had been

so successful in optometry—staffing, resources, infrastructure and research—but on a grander scale.

Together with responsibility for the faculty came an expectation of leadership generally within the university. The Vice-Chancellor at the time, Professor Dennis Gibson, had a high opinion of Ken's style: 'He has an interesting management style that is based around reading everything carefully, knowing how to get things done in large, complicated organisations, listening carefully and speaking rarely. Good listeners who speak rarely are uncommon in universities.'[5]

Ken has also had several stints acting as Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University, some for many months at a time. Throughout, he has emphasised the marshalling of resources, creating the right infrastructure and having good people around you as the keys to success in these complex academic environments.

The architect

One of the legacies that Ken Bowman will leave at QUT is the implementation of a strategy of creating major new buildings designed specifically for academic purposes. His skills at identifying needs, at 'selling' concepts, playing important and often key roles in raising the funds and managing the projects all come together in these endeavours. Ken has been the force behind four such initiatives at QUT.

He was heavily involved in a new building (shared with the Faculty of Law) for the Department of Optometry and its Clinic, which opened in the City campus in 1988. A new building to bring together the schools within the Faculty of Health was completed on the Kelvin Grove Campus of QUT in 1994.

The Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, a $55 million research facility with 400 researchers from across numerous areas of biomedical, medical engineering and health fields, was completed in 2006 and a $95 million health clinic, physical activity centre, and commercial enterprise in the Kelvin Grove Urban Village was completed in 2008.

Ken's work with a major international philanthropic group, Atlantic Philan-

thropies,[a] was crucial to these last two projects. The fact that this group provided very large financial support to the two projects speaks volumes about Ken's planning skills and his ability to deliver on projects. In yet another example of good timing and being aware of unique opportunities, his linking of projects to Queensland's Smart State agenda was similarly crucial. Perhaps watching his mentor Professor Barry Cole undertake building projects at Melbourne all those years ago was an inspiration to his own achievements.

Working with the health system

As Dean of the Faculty of Health, Ken Bowman has worked closely with many government and hospital organisations. The current emphasis on meeting health workforce needs and optimising the contribution of all health workers, medical and otherwise, has been embraced by universities like QUT as a critical initiative in health education. Ken has long held influential roles in organisations such as the Brisbane North Regional Health Authority, the Royal Brisbane and Womens Hospital and District Health Council, and the Council of Deans of Health Science. In 2004, he was appointed to the Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee, a national advisory body set up to assist the Australian Health Ministers with health workforce planning. His impact on health services in Queensland was recognised by Professor Rob Stable, a previous Director-General of Queensland Health and now Vice-Chancellor and President of Bond University, who commented on Ken's 'strong determination to get things done' and 'his wise counsel'.[6]

An example of the initiatives pursued by Ken to help with health workforce needs both nationally and in Queensland was the introduction of degrees for paramedics and programs in intensive and emergency care. He has also worked very closely with colleagues in China and Vietnam to bring new educational opportunities to them, particularly in nursing and public health, again with significant financial support from Atlantic Philanthropies.

Ken also served for six years on the National Health and Medical Research Council, including a period on the Council Executive. From his beginnings in optometric education, his influence clearly spread to include national health-care issues in the broadest sense with the peak body in health care.

While his involvement in state and national health initiatives grew, Ken still had ongoing influence in optometric matters, serving for example for six years on the Optometrists Board of Queensland, three of them as Deputy Chairman and one as Chairman.

Honours

Given that his work and influence encompass not only state but national and international arenas, and not only optometry but health education in general, it is not surprising that Ken Bowman's contributions have been recognised by many people and many groups.

In optometry, the Queensland and Northern Territory Division of Optometrists Association Australia named Ken as Optometrist of the Year in 2000.

In 1999, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) 'for service to education and optometry'. Incidentally, this award meant that the undergraduate optometry class of 1970 at The University of Melbourne has the distinction of two such awardees: Tony Gibson received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2004.[7]

Ken Bowman's professional career started with optometric practice in Melbourne. As opportunities came along, Ken grasped them and through skill and determination he became an experienced and wise university manager who has had a broad influence on health education. Ken has always believed that his roles as Head of Department and Executive Dean of Faculty are truly creative endeavours and not just managerial and administrative.

They provide an opportunity to create an environment in which the organisation and its staff can succeed. Understanding the dynamics of large organisations and knowing how to get things done within them has been at the heart of his success.

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a. Atlantic Philanthropies was founded in 1984 by Chuck Feeney, who had made his fortune from his chain of Duty Free Shops. The foundation seeks to bring about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people, and distributes over US$400 million a year.