



***Choices and Responsibilities:
Higher Education in the Knowledge Society***

Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE)

What is a University in the 21st Century?

Brian Denman

Abstract: The term 'university' has a longstanding history, yet its definition remains highly contentious at the turn of the century. According to conventional scholarship, the first university initially appeared as far back as the fifteenth century with the formation of the University of Paris and the University of Bologna (circa 1150 AD). Other scholars, however, contend that the university may have begun many centuries earlier, depending on the definition employed (Neave 1999; Welch and Denman 1997; Patterson 1997). The intent of this paper is to suggest a classification of universities for the 21st Century, with emphasis placed on the university's role in disseminating and advancing knowledge through scholarship and research. Drawing upon major historic events that have shaped universities in their various forms, this paper discusses whether universities are designed to cater to market forces or are catalysts for change in an increasingly 'knowledge-based' society.