PROFESSOR ASHLEY GOLDSWORTHY
AO OBE FTSE
Executive Director

What has changed in the intervening 18 years that has influence on B-HERT’s mission? Very little. Just one example.

In his inaugural address Sir Ninian, in commenting on the issues confronting business and higher education said, “...one such area, already becoming notorious...is the failure of the sciences and of engineering to attract at tertiary level enough of the best young minds. Every time I meet groups of ambitious young people in Years 11 or 12 and ask them what their ambitions are their answers are depressingly familiar- their aspirations are overwhelmingly the law, medicine, or business studies.”

One of our recent activities was a one-day symposium in February (2008) on Building Tomorrow’s Engineers, where the very issue Ninian Stephen identified was one of the topics for discussion.

What of the future? Dynamic changes in structures, processes, opportunities, relationships, and mindsets will need to be the drivers of change. The status quo is a very inappropriate indicator of the future we need in higher education in Australia.

The future will require much more active and committed involvement and participation by all stakeholders, particularly business and industry. The failure of the business community in general to actively engage in meaningful dialogue with the higher education sector in this country is inexcusable. As a result there is a significant gap in mutual understanding between the sectors.

As a basis for obtaining the broad commitment required for change, it is important to provide the external communities/stakeholders (employers, students, parents, the general community etc.) with a better understanding and appreciation of the current higher education sector’s contribution to society and its central role in sustaining a civil society.

There is enormous potential for industry and business to derive increased value from links with universities, and for universities similarly to benefit from increased clarity on the needs and motivations of its relevant stakeholders. It is often difficult to get industry to engage and the right mechanisms and operating models are required. Elevating the importance of this collaboration at the political level is an indispensable component.

The vital importance of lifelong learning is widely accepted and it is seen as one of the critical elements in building the skills base for the knowledge industries of tomorrow. It will force dramatic changes to education, particularly post-compulsory education, and to business.

EDITORIAL

In recent times we have seen some new appointments as Vice-Chancellor. I am sure that each has a vision for the future for their institution and a clear idea of the challenges they face. The corollary is that we have also seen departures from the ranks of Vice-Chancellor, each of whom has made a significant contribution to higher education over the years.

I thought it would be a useful exercise to try and capture some of those visions and identify those challenges, and at the same time to try and capture some of those experiences and the wisdom that has come from them.

The contributions raise a number of interesting issues with respect to higher education and university governance.

This will also be my last issue of B-HERT NEWS as I leave B-HERT on 1st August, after 10 very challenging and rewarding years as Executive Director.

In 1989, the Business Council of Australia (BCA) recognised the need to create more effective links between business (its members - big business) and higher education (universities). As Chairman of the BCA’s Education and Training Committee I was given the task of investigating what might be done.

We looked at what was happening overseas in this respect and, after inviting the Chairman and CEO of The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) (which had been established in 1986) from the United Kingdom for meetings with BCA members and Vice-Chancellors in Sydney and Melbourne, decided to follow that model.

B-HERT was duly launched by the Governor-General His Excellency the Right Honourable Sir Ninian Stephen KG PC AK GCMG GCVO KBE K StJ on 5th December 1990.
In many ways it is early days in Australia and the largely clouded extent of these coming changes must be thoroughly understood by education providers, government and business. The failure to do so by all concerned will be nothing less than devastating. Up to the present there has been a worrying lack of effective linkages between the various stakeholders. Lifelong learning has to be a collaborative effort and this needs discussion and interaction.

One of the central issues is the need for more effective integration between providers in the post-compulsory education sector. One of the problems Australia faces in many arenas is the lack of critical mass. In such circumstances drawing lines in the sand to separate activities is often counterproductive. In the education arena we too often talk of “higher education” or “vocational education and training” rather than “post-secondary” or “post-compulsory education”. There are many issues on which universities and VET warrant separate consideration. But at a time when we are urging collaboration rather than competition, when problems in regional, rural and remote areas need to be addressed, there is an even greater need to focus on the broader area of post-compulsory education.

There needs to be a better integration or linking of programmes, better articulation, better sharing of resources (including money), better servicing of regional, rural and remote areas, broader collaboration, a better skilled workforce, and if we saw the pool of resources and the challenges as the broader tapestry of post-compulsory education we would not be as constrained in our solutions or our thinking.

There needs to be a radial change in attitude and thinking to break out of the box and see post-compulsory education as an arena which warrants more coherent consideration.

Traditional roles of the sectors are blurring as the post compulsory education sector responds to the needs of the new economy and rapidly changing labour markets. We are managing the drift between the sectors without a guiding policy framework. Conflicting policy and priority settings between the Commonwealth and the states create problems. The Commonwealth and the states need to develop a nationally consistent post-compulsory education policy framework that clarifies the role of the Commonwealth and the states. For example, the states have a very significant interest in the output and outcomes from universities but have very limited ability to participate in the strategies and inputs and hence in the necessary collaboration between HE, VET and the schools sectors. This is not to advocate an additional layer of bureaucracy.

Industry has a critical leadership role and formal responsibilities in post-compulsory education. There is a need to reconcile the deregulated demand driven market with the broader role of the public system of post-compulsory education in ensuring an adequate skill base for the future.

Many international surveys suggest that by world standards, Australia’s university sector is not driving innovation as well as in many competitor nations. Funding needs to be changed to improve this outcome.

There needs to be much greater investment in research infrastructure at Australian universities. In too many instances our laboratories are far from world standard and in some instances incredibly dated and inadequate. The Education Investment Fund (EIF) is an $11 billion fund announced in the 2008-09 Budget. The EIF will include $5 billion from the 2007-08 and 2008-09 Budget surpluses, plus $6 billion from absorbing the Higher Education Endowment Fund.

The key priorities of the EIF will be capital expenditure and renewal and refurbishment in universities and vocational institutions, as well as in research facilities and major research institutions.

EIF, which is to service vocational institutions and major research institutions as well as universities, will provide only a fraction of the funds needed for capital works. (It is approximately one-third of the endowment of Harvard University). It needs to be at least $20 billion. Then it may have some real impact.

Likewise, Australia’s research output, measured by number of patent families per thousand capita population, is very low by international standards.

There are a number of critical issues which need to be addressed with respect to enhancing our innovation system and hopefully improving our innovation performance: a critical shortage of engineering, science, and mathematics graduates; the need to improve the quality of teaching of mathematics and science in our schools; stronger support for the vital role of Australian research in innovation; the need to increase our level of investment in R & D; the need to develop more inclusive interdisciplinary approaches to research and collaboration; the need to create more of a demand driven research culture; and government programs need to be more targeted and focussed.

There needs to be much more focus on business, social and environmental opportunities and problems rather than unfocussed R&D or commercialisation of existing IP. Also in the spectrum of R&D there needs to be much more focus on commercialisation rather than on R&D itself. Government grants and concessions in Australia tend to focus on innovation and R&D and neglect commercialisation, which is the most costly and difficult phase of the innovation spectrum.

Australia is good at inventing, but poor at turning the ideas into commercial products and services.

The business community saw the decision in the recent budget to discontinue the Commercial Ready Grant program as a poor and ill-judged decision.

Government procurement programs should support Australian innovation. The enormous funds sitting in superannuation could be imaginatively used to support innovation.

In the innovation sphere we have to extend our horizon beyond the physical sciences. Service industries are an important and growing sector of our economy. In a similar vein the humanities and social sciences are often neglected when we speak of innovation. We need to adopt a broader view of the potential and application of innovation.

It would seem to make sense, in an environment of scarce and limited resources, to focus our attention on challenges of national importance, such as water, the ecology, an ageing population, energy, and infrastructure (communications, roads, rail, and ports). These priorities would need to be reviewed from time to time.

Australia’s success to date in the international market could well be a false dawn or an Indian summer. The high proportion of overseas students is welcome but on the other hand is a funding source which could quickly disappear. Some of our best markets are themselves investing huge resources into higher education, and there is every likelihood the flow of overseas students could substantially reduce. Universities have become very reliant (perhaps over reliant) on fees from overseas students and we have seen very recently significant impacts on some Australian universities from a sudden drop in overseas enrolments.

We are also likely to see a growing reverse trend of Australian students going overseas to study, encouraged by the global economy and the high quality of emerging higher education institutions in countries such as China, India, South East Asia and the Arab world. We should positively encourage this.
The status quo in higher education in Australia is not sustainable if we as a nation believe that future prosperity, equity and sustainability will predominantly come from being a knowledge-based society.

There can be little doubt that the current funding model and level of funding is inadequate. The current government funding framework is not a sustainable mechanism by which to support Australia’s higher education system in the longer term.

The issue is not funding for more students, it is funding for quality, excellence, access, and student support.

Philanthropy is an essential ingredient in the long-term development of Australia’s universities. In comparison with leading developed nations there is considerable scope for the development of Australia’s universities. In comparison with philanthropy is an essential ingredient in the long-term quality, excellence, access, and student support.

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Philanthropy is an essential ingredient in the long-term development of Australia’s universities.
B-HERT is astounding. He has been CEO and Chair of several public companies in a variety of industries, with Australian and global recognition for his contribution to the Information Technology industry. He was Dean of Business and Professor of Leadership at Bond University. He has been active in a wide range of charities and cultural interests with a special passion and family connection with ballet. And of course he has been Federal President of the Liberal Party.

His retirement gives B-HERT the opportunity to recognise Ashley, who in addition to his AO and OBE is a Fellow of nine learned bodies and a recipient of the Centenary Medal. Indeed, a great Australian.

Post B-HERT, Ashley’s range of activities is exhausting to contemplate including for example, being part way through a Master’s Degree in Theology. In my ten year association with Ashley, I have enjoyed sharing in discussion with him about B-HERT and just about any other subject.

I want to take the opportunity to thank Ashley’s wife Shirley for her direct and indirect support of B-HERT, and especially thank Anne Munday and Chris Goldsworthy for their support of Ashley and for the contribution they have made and continue to make to BHERT’s success and reputation.

Ashley, so many thanks and very best wishes for the future.

INTRODUCING THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Business/Higher Education Round Table is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr Sharon Winocur as the organisation’s new Executive Director. Dr Winocur comes to B-HERT from senior executive positions in the Victorian and Queensland Public Service following a successful university career as both an academic and an administrator.

Following an academic career in psychology, Dr Winocur established the first Office of Equal Opportunity at the University of Queensland.

Dr Winocur jointed the Queensland Public Service in 1991 and the Victorian Public Service in 2004. During her public service career, Dr Winocur held various senior executive positions including Director of Equity, Human Resources and Industrial Relations.

Dr Winocur has expressed her excitement to be in a role once again promoting the value of education. “It is an ideal time to be taking up this position because education, research and innovation have all become priority areas for government. Directions that flow from this current debate will be the key to determining Australia’s future educational and global competitiveness.”

CHALLENGES FOR ECU IN THE DECADE AHEAD

Introduction

Edith Cowan University (ECU), now with more than 20,000 students, has made very rapid progress since its establishment in 1991, building on the vision, energy and efforts over some decades of political, community and University leaders. Our rapid development has occurred despite lower rates of attainment in higher education in Western Australia compared with many other regions in Australia and, more recently, the apparent disaffection with higher education in Western Australia attributed to the resources boom. Other challenges to the rapid growth at ECU include the partial indexation of the Commonwealth Grant over an extended period and the very significant costs for IT infrastructure, software and training mandated by the technological revolution. Adequate funds for research opportunities that would be of significant value to the communities the University was established to serve and the need to renew an ageing staffing profile are significant challenges in the next decade.

Of critical importance to Western Australia, and thus to ECU now and in the years ahead, include working out ways to ‘mine the head power’ of the State, as well as the rocks in the North-West, and in so doing to build human capacity for the future. Support for our students to help them establish an appropriate balance between time spent working to generate money in order to live, and time available for study is a major issue. Having sufficient accommodation near our campuses that is of good quality and affordable, especially for our international students, is also a challenge.

Yet another, not just for ECU, but for universities throughout the world is to find ways of value-adding to our communities without eroding the independence of the particular university from influential power groups in the wider community, especially the Government of the day.

At ECU we are tackling these challenges through our distinctive mission which is to undertake ‘…..teaching and research inspired by engagement and partnerships……’. Through this approach we aim to be linked-in to the many diverse communities we serve in Western Australia and elsewhere, so that advances to the foundations of knowledge and its dissemination can be value-adding and capacity building for those outside the University. Through these means we can contribute in a timely way to the prosperity, wellbeing, and sustainability of the wider world. In addition, our approach provides immense professional satisfaction for the students and staff of ECU.

Background on the modern ECU of today

The University has an enviable reputation for teacher education going back to the founding institution of Claremont Teachers College in 1902. Over many decades various Teachers’ Colleges
made significant contributions to Western Australia through the education and training of teachers. In due course, the merger of these colleges to form the Western Australian College of Advanced Education in the 80s became the forerunner of the modern and flexible Edith Cowan University (ECU) which commenced operations in 1991. This strong commitment over 100 years of service to the people of Western Australia is deeply embedded in the psyche of ECU.

The academic course profile in the first decade of the 21st century is now much broader than was the case in previous decades and research at exacting international standards and of relevance to the communities we were established to serve enjoys prominence regionally, nationally and internationally. Another big difference between the modern ECU and its precursor institutions, also of great benefit to the University, is that almost 20% of the student population comes from some 90 countries.

The vision for a university in the northern suburbs of Perth – some 50 years ago!

The thoughtfulness of political leaders almost half a century ago to make land available for a ‘university presence’ in Joondalup, a satellite suburb some 25 kms north of the CBD of Perth, is a fine example of long-term planning by our political and community leaders. The City of Joondalup, which is home to one of the two major campuses of ECU in Perth, is now well established with some 150,000 people. The nearby City of Wanneroo has been growing rapidly and is expected to reach 250,000 people over the next ten years. The other nearby municipalities of Stirling and Swan will also grow significantly over the next decade. In the global knowledge economy in which we all live and work, it will be crucial that these rapidly expanding communities are well serviced at pre-school, school, TAFE and university levels. ECU is well-positioned to be a significant contributor to the well-being of those who live and work in these suburbs.

Also visionary by the early planners was the establishment of a fast train service which now runs from Mandurah, 60kms south of Perth, to suburbs beyond Joondalup through the CBD of Perth. It is very pleasing that an increasing proportion of students and staff are using this train and the free shuttle bus from the station to the Joondalup campus thereby reducing CO₂ emissions and the need for car parks at the University. Also pleasing is the decision of politicians and university leaders over the last decade to close ECU’s operations in the suburbs of Claremont and Churchlands so that the University could expand in the rapidly growing new northern suburbs, using the funds from the sale of the Claremont and Churchlands campuses for capital development at the Joondalup and Mount Lawley campuses. These far-sighted decisions have led to an excellent modern campus at Joondalup and to significant improvements in the capital stock at the Mount Lawley campus. The University is thus well placed to be an on-going significant contributor to the further rapid development of this part of Australia over the next 50 years as well as, importantly, to the South-West of Western Australia through our campus at Bunbury.

How is ECU tackling the challenges of the next ten years?

To increase participation in higher education by Western Australians ECU has improved access by reducing the emphasis that previously has been placed on the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) as the only definitive indicator of likely success in higher education. Working with local schools and drawing extensively on their advice we have developed pathways for students who have the ability and motivation to succeed at university, but not necessarily the TER which would guarantee them a place. This approach to the core work of the University through engagement and partnerships with our local schools has created many opportunities for students who have been successful at university notwithstanding that the traditional TER approach would have had them shut-out of higher education.

Our engagement with our many diverse communities more broadly in the University at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels is enhanced by negotiated inputs between the responsible academic groupings within ECU and those with the expertise outside the University concerning our curriculum, approaches to course delivery and the development of course materials and professional internships. In many cases these experts outside ECU are the future employers of our graduates. We also encourage our students to develop further their civic and citizenship responsibilities through acting as volunteers, both for services and activities within the University and in the wider community.

Examples of our success with this approach include our Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre which allows our law students, under supervision, to provide pro bono services to those in the wider community who may be entangled in various legal disputes. Another is the learning undertaken by our psychology students in local primary schools where they work with youngsters with learning difficulties. Under supervision, our Psychology students put academic theory into practice. The benefit for our primary school pupils is the development of much greater confidence in reading, writing and speaking which are all prerequisite attributes if they are to realise their potential.

Nursing students likewise benefit from new world-class facilities in which real life (and death) scenarios are simulated using actors from our Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. This approach here at ECU, allows our trainee nurses to develop competence and confidence to provide effective and timely care for people who otherwise might die (in real life) unless treated appropriately and promptly.

There are many examples of research at ECU which has extended the foundations of knowledge in the particular discipline and also been of great benefit to our communities. These include the work of Kamal Alameh (Early Inventor of the Year in Western Australia in 2007) and his colleagues to greatly speed up the transmission of digital data. In a quite separate project led by Alameh, through the brilliant use of lasers, the application of herbicides in agriculture can be reduced by 60% to 80% thereby reducing farming costs, water consumption, ecological change and the addition of potentially harmful additives to food destined for consumption by humans and animals.

Our Health and Wellness experts in the Vario Health Institute contribute in a variety of ways. Donna Cross and her colleagues are highly regarded for their excellent work in reducing bullying at Schools and in Workplaces. Rob Newton and his colleagues draw on their knowledge and expertise of Exercise Science, Nutrition and Psychology to develop programs to help those who are fit, remain fit; to help those teenagers (and even younger) who are very over-weight to lose weight, and to help much older people recovering from cardio-vascular incidents, surgery or chemotherapy to lead happier and healthier lives without necessarily incurring costly pharmaceutical, hospital and medical interventions.

There are a great number of other examples of excellent work concerned with the environment, with early childhood development, with literacy and numeracy, ways to promote the teaching of science in the early and middle years of school and ground-breaking work, in partnership with others, tackling Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s Disease and Malignant Melanoma. Further evidence of our success in teaching and research through engagement is shown from the three awards (of 10 Australia-wide) in 2006 from B-HERT for University-Industry
partnerships. These included innovative training programs for small businesses in Australia; the rapid identification of forensic ballistics involving WA Police and collaborators in China; and, enhancement of aviation security through our partnership with Emirates Airlines.

Organisational sustainability in the decade ahead

To tackle the reduction in purchasing power each year brought about by the partial indexation of our Commonwealth Grant, the leadership team and the governing body at ECU are deeply committed to planning and to prioritising as well as to searching for more cost-effective ways to carry out and support our core work of teaching and research. We put much effort into adjusting our priorities, on a continuing basis, but in the context of a long-term plan. We also put considerable effort into expanding and strengthening the partners with whom we undertake our teaching and research programs and to finding new partners who may be able to provide in a much more cost effective way than ECU could, services such as accommodation for students, maintenance of our physical plant or the security of our campuses.

For each year, the University Council places great importance on setting the recurrent annual budget in the context of likely expenditures and revenue three years ahead such that the University does not establish unfunded liabilities which could jeopardise our financial future. The dilemma of the IT revolution, and its huge potential cost, is managed through evaluation of a variety of expert advice, and not seeking to be the first university in the world to implement the very latest IT opportunity. Our staffing issues are being approached through recruitment of well-established, experienced professors still at a formative stage of their careers, as well as the recruitment of staff whose careers are at an early stage of development. We will be putting considerable effort into professional development programs that meet the needs of individuals and of groups of staff, but in the context of the organisational goals of the University as a whole.

Concluding remarks

Whilst the University faces many challenges in the immediate future as we strive to provide opportunities for individuals and groups to reach their potential in this global knowledge economy, I believe that it is highly likely that ECU will continue to develop rapidly as a modern University deeply committed to, and successful in, engaging with those in the many communities we were established to serve. Our ‘industry’ – that of knowledge including expansion, dissemination and timely application - is in huge demand world-wide. Universities can take lead roles on global issues such as social inclusivity, sustainability, increased productivity and improved health through changes to lifestyles. That is what ECU has been working on in past years and will be the focus for the decade ahead. That is what the late Edith Cowan, a marvellous leader in the early years of the 19th century, would have wanted us to do at the University named in her honour.

SO VERY SINGULAR WITHIN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Along with the key to the executive bathroom, every Vice-Chancellor inherits two sets of challenges upon their elevation. The first is the set of challenges common to every institution within the sector. The second comprises the particular horrors of the institution concerned. Depending upon the interaction between the two, the executive bathroom may see a good deal of use.

Unsurprisingly, The Australian Catholic University conforms to this general pattern. It needs to negotiate the treacherous currents of Australian higher education generally and to float successfully on the rips and eddies of its own very singular institutional character. As Vice-Chancellor, one is simultaneously captain, navigator and occasional panicked passenger.

Undoubtedly the biggest challenge to all Australian universities over the next decade will be their need to carve out a highly distinctive individual niche within the dominant diversity paradigm. This will be confronting for all universities, but will be particularly confronting to those whose profile is roughly “standard” within the sector, especially those universities which do not fall within the magic circle of prestige, wealth and age.

Inevitably, a diverse sector will require distinctive institutions and distinctiveness demands concentration. Concentration in turn necessitates choice and the making of choices will produce relatively small numbers of winners and large numbers of losers within any given institution. These sorts of considerations will be giving most Vice-Chancellor’s sleepless nights in the coming months.

Vice-Chancellors also spend a good deal of time worrying about money: more than is good for them according to many politicians. The difficulty is that, even if one does regard universities as privileged ivory towers into which dollars are lured and then eaten, they still have to be maintained and progressively funded.

This is getting harder. One aspect, quite apart from general complaints of underfunding, is the difficulties universities have in improving their position by expanding their operations. On the one hand, obtaining an increase in student places from the Commonwealth outside very confined categories is extremely difficult, while on the other, public universities no longer can offer fee-paying places. The net effect is of a growth-freeze outside the international and higher degree markets.

Of course, all this is exacerbated by the fact that a deteriorating demographic means that, at least in the case of school-leavers, there may not be any students to attract anyway. Many universities thus are stuck in a financial rut defined by underfunding and a very limited set of opportunities to alleviate their position.

Another perennial problem for universities is the complexity of their planning task. Captains of industry who condemn Vice-
Chancellors as corporate dunces might think again if they had to co-ordinate a multi-campus, multi-faculty, multi-product, multi-market university of up to 40,000 souls and quite a large number of delicate egos.

This is exacerbated both by the complexity of market movements and the rapidity of change in government policy. On the last point, higher education arguably is one of the most hyper-regulated industries in Australia and has undergone at least four major regulatory shifts over the last quarter of a century. The compliance costs alone occasioned by this process of constant change are boggling.

Beyond such macro issues, any Vice-Chancellor now has to concentrate closely upon their staff. Given its highly regulated status, limited funding and relatively ungenerous remuneration, academia is much less attractive as a career option than it once was. This has the effect, both that it is difficult to attract quality new entrants, and that the academic workforce is ageing alarmingly. The result is that the chief executive officer of a university is more concerned than ever that quality staff are being attracted to his or her institution, with the only realistic option being mutual cannibalization of staff between competing universities.

Finally, there is the trifling challenge of understanding the demands of the higher education market, which is a little like psychoanalysing Cerberus. To begin with, the different segments of the market – school leaver, mature age, international, higher degree and so forth – have completely different demands and preferences.

But even understanding the “traditional” school leavers is a daunting challenge in itself. Today’s eighteen year olds are not only vastly different from the average fifty-plus Vice-Chancellor, but in some ways are radically different from the corresponding cadre of only five years ago in terms of their technological demands, cultural priorities, social positions and learning preferences. Just keeping up with them, let alone understanding them, is an exhausting prospect for everybody from a university’s marketing operation to its Philosophy department.

Apart from all these generic challenges which are shared by everyone from James Cook to Curtin, the Vice-Chancellor of The Australian Catholic University faces issues highly specific to that institution. Indeed, the institution itself is so very specific, so very singular within the Australian context, as to be absolutely unique. It is, after all, Australia’s only Catholic university that also is a fully public university, and also is Australia’s only plausible candidate for the title of a truly “national” university, running six campuses across three States (New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland) and the Australian Capital Territory. Every aspect of this uniqueness carries with it its own special requirements.

The Catholicity of the University is fundamental to every aspect of its character. The oldest university tradition is, after all, the Catholic tradition, and The Australian Catholic University partakes fully of that tradition. This involves a multiplicity of responsibilities: for the culture, philosophy and values of the University; its intellectual perspective and orientation; its relationship with the wider Church; its commitment to a Catholic position of social justice and so forth.

Yet at the same time, the University is one operating within a wider society, and draws both students and staff from backgrounds that are not necessarily Catholic, Christian or even religious. The University must be able to deliver value to these members of its community as well as to Catholics. The reality is that core elements of the Catholic university tradition – a focus on the liberal arts, including philosophy and theology; a deep spirituality; a pervasive ethical understanding; and an absolute commitment to the value of the person – are widely appealing quite beyond the bounds of Catholicism. But the need to understand and demonstrate that the twin elements of “Catholic” and “University” are mutually reinforcing lies at the heart of the task facing the Vice-Chancellor of any Catholic university.

Another great challenge for The Australian Catholic University is its multi-campus character. This is not merely the multi-campus scenario of a university having more than one campus in a metropolitan area, or one or two large regional campuses, or even a number of small, quite remote, outlying operations. This is the challenge of a university having at the heart of its operations four reasonably sized metropolitan campuses (averaging around three thousand students each) strung along an arc from Banyo in Brisbane to Fitzroy in Melbourne.

The complications posed here are prodigious. To take just one example, marketing is a particular challenge. Whereas the University of Melbourne knows that if it advertises for accounting students in Melbourne it will hit at least the core of its market, The Australian Catholic University is faced with the fact that an advertisement for nurses in Brisbane will do absolutely nothing for its Melbourne market and vice versa. Similarly, staff recruitment is extremely complex, as the best candidate for a vacancy in Sydney may well be in Melbourne while the perfect existing staff member to plug a gap in Brisbane may be very happily domiciled in Canberra. When you add to this such obvious issues as the cost of travel and maintaining quality and consistency over long distances, it probably is just as well that the current Vice-Chancellor has formed a passionate commitment to federalism during his academic career as a constitutional lawyer.

As with federalism, the answer is not simple. It would be relatively straightforward in design terms to strongly centralize the University, but this would risk the commitment and engagement of the local communities which provide both its vigor and its constituency. My own proposal is for a thorough re-structure of the University that will centralize its strategic vigor and its constituency. My own proposal is for a thorough re-structure of the University that will centralize its strategic capacity, while seeking to maximize local operational control of delivery and engagement.

In terms of pursuing a diversity agenda, the very singularity of the University renders the occupation of a distinct niche rather easier. After all, how many Catholic, public universities operating across four jurisdictions are there in Australia? This said, the University will need to think clearly about those areas of teaching and research that it intends on marking out as being in some sense peculiarly its own. Again, the character of the University gives clear direction here. The University is strong in such areas as theology and philosophy (and will be stronger after the imminent establishment of a distinct faculty in this area); the cross-disciplinary field of social justice; and those aspects of health and education with a strong correlation to the values and operations of the vast Catholic health and education sectors.

Paradoxically among the Australian universities, the Australian Catholic University probably needs to broaden as it specializes. This is because the University is exceptionally concentrated in its offerings. Thus, for example, it is the largest University provider of nurses in Australia, but has not used its evident expertise in health science to broaden its degree offerings into Allied Health. Similarly, while the University is a major provider of teachers, it has not expanded its operations in the field of business to anything like that undertaken by other Australian universities. Such potential opportunities need to be systematically examined.

In terms of research, the University needs to apply the same
type of concentration process that underlies the remainder of the diversity agenda. A university like The Australian Catholic University cannot realistically afford to spread its research across a wide range of disciplines. Rather, it must concentrate its research in those fields which define its wider diversity niche, with researchers in other disciplines being encouraged to angle their own research along cross-disciplinary lines in the same directions.

Finally, like many Universities we will need to refresh our staff profile on a systematic basis. Some of the very disciplines in which the University specializes have a particularly confined staff profile and there is an urgent need to assure their on-going sustainability. I suspect that this will involve very considerable investment and a significant liberalization of employment practices.

The old Chinese curse was “May you live in interesting times”. It perhaps should be “I hope you become a Vice-Chancellor.”

**ASPIRATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA**

My vision is that Australia will have the best higher education system in the world, supporting the world’s best educated and most innovative, cohesive and sustainable society. I have even written that aspiration into UniSA’s own Vision, Mission and Values statement.

The vision that *UniSA will be a leading contributor to Australia having the best higher education system in the world, supporting the world’s best educated and most innovative, cohesive and sustainable society*, is not just about UniSA but about the sector delivering a world class university system.

To achieve this vision we will have to overcome many challenges and bring about real change in the three key areas I have addressed below. It won’t be easy, but I believe we collectively have the will and the ability to make it happen.

**Developing an internationally benchmarked metrics system with KPIs**

A priority is to find a broadly accepted yet comprehensive way to measure and critically assess our progress. An internationally benchmarked metrics system with KPIs that reflect Australian innovation will help define and judge the nature and quality of contributions made by individual institutions. It will also facilitate evidence-based policy development and targeted investment, and will reward what is meaningful and aligned with national aspirations.

The failure to develop metrics to gauge the quality and health of our whole system and to recognise the value of collaboration (including through the yet to be defined “compacts” mooted by the Federal Government) will be a barrier to changing institutional aspirations and behaviour for the greater common good. If these metrics are not developed we could see the sector chasing the dream of individual “top-universities” which, even the most superficial analysis shows, does not necessarily correlate with innovative national capacity, social cohesion, financial prosperity and equitable outcomes.

This is not to say that Australia should abandon an ambition to have the best system output per capita in the OECD. On the contrary, we must strive to have the best teaching and learning outcomes as well as the best research and innovation outcomes per capita in the OECD. This will require much additional investment from both the public and private sector – a precondition for having a top system as well as top-ranked individual institutions.

**Increased collaboration between universities and business to ensure the transfer of knowledge**

Knowledge transfer is a missing link in Australia. We must create a higher education system that is more broadly engaged with end users of research and knowledge application. This must also be accompanied by changed attitudes in our business community. Recent *Eurostats* figures show that external collaboration by business is low in Australia compared with the likes of Ireland, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. (Steen ABF – eurostat news release 27/2007 22 Feb. 2007 and ABS Cat. 8158.0) To achieve greater engagement with higher education, business and the community we need strategies that include measurement and recognition of engagement, up-front investment and funded exchange of staff and students between the higher education institutions and external organisations. A barrier to such behaviour is the lack of incentives, including research quality assessments that do not attempt to define, quantify or reward such interactive behaviour.

As with the recently abandoned Research Quality Framework initiative, the new Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative must include measures that reward productive interactions between the higher education sector and other segments of the economy. We also need to see more research-trained individuals in business and a greater transfer of people between the two sectors. We need to have twice as many Australians with PhDs, and the Rudd Government’s commitment to double the number of students engaged in postgraduate research degrees is a step in the right direction.

At my own university I would like to see the majority of academic staff engaged in both teaching and research, and all of them engaged in deep scholarship where full knowledge of relevant research outcomes informs individual teaching efforts. A barrier to this goal lies in the difficulty of replacing an ageing academic workforce.

Most important, Australia needs a constant supply of graduates with high-end skills, and I am convinced that such graduates must be trained in an environment informed by a strong research culture. UniSA, a young university with an already impressive and growing research footprint, recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian National University – the most research intensive university in Australia. The MoU builds on the Federal Government’s collaborative approach for strengthening Australia’s higher education sector, provides expanded opportunities for students to study and move between the two universities, and builds a framework for working together in research and research training. This type of agreement seeks to harness the best elements of individual institutions to supply graduates educated in environments where resources are deployed optimally rather than duplicated and spread too thinly.

An open exchange of staff between university and business environments is crucial to ensure the transfer of knowledge and the maintenance of collaborative working links. If the sector is serious about developing an educated society and contributing...
to the country’s innovation and sustainability, it is essential for educators to be informed and in tune with the needs of business. The 2007 OECD Innovation and Growth Report amplifies this view.

‘Efforts are also needed to boost exchanges of tacit knowledge between the public and private sectors, through the movement of human resources, for example, low rates of research mobility between the private and public sectors remain a major bottleneck to knowledge flows in many countries.’

(Innovation and Growth: Rationale for an Innovation Strategy OECD Report 2007, pp 20)

Australia traditionally benchmarks the performance of its higher education and innovation systems against those in the US and UK. However, there are countries with smaller but strong economies such as Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland which have relatively high levels of government and business investment in research and development (see Table 1). Interestingly these countries, which perform highly in R&D, do not have universities in the top 20 on the Shanghai Jiao Tong World University Rankings.

Australia is a country of many talents and it has a terrific track record as a generator of knowledge, but we could do better as an innovator of new products, services and brands. We need to enhance funding to ensure that the output per capita is the best in the world (as indeed it is in the five non-English speaking countries listed in Table 1) rather than focussing on the largely irrelevant ranking of individual institutions.

Increasing the participation rate in Australian higher education through improved access and enhanced quality

I would like to see the participation rate in Australian higher education enhanced at all levels. I believe this is possible and desirable from both a social and an economic perspective, particularly if the resources are available to tailor the higher education experience to the needs and abilities of individual students. There has been some debate concerning the merit of such aspirations and the danger of it leading to “blue collar disadvantage”. Evidence from the OECD does not support such concerns, however; indeed, it suggests that quite the opposite is true. The following quote from the OECD Innovation and Growth report illustrates the centrality of the vision for enhanced participation:

“Education policy makers are paying increasing attention to innovative outcomes, and there is increasing emphasis towards a school environment which is less elitist, less compartmentalised between training for theoretical and practical understanding, and geared towards making a vast majority of students successful.”


In terms of tertiary education, this means creating and maintaining a system of diverse, sustainable and high-quality institutions which are free to respond to demand and accountable for the outcomes they produce. It also means ensuring that the growth and development of tertiary education systems are managed in ways that improve access and enhance quality.

I believe we need to increase the wealth of knowledge in Australia, which clearly requires a greater participation in tertiary education. I am proud that internal studies show how successful UniSA’s approach to teaching and learning has been in tackling the disadvantage associated with social background. Data collected by postcode shows that the gap between students from different suburbs is significant when they first arrive (as measured by their Tertiary Entrance Rank) but has narrowed significantly by the end of their first year (as measured by their results) and it continues to narrow each following year.

The demand for more and better education continues to increase, with substantial payoffs in terms of earnings and productivity gains. An example of UniSA responding to demand and providing access to tertiary education is our innovative partnership with OneSteel, which sees academics from our Whyalla and city campuses delivering an Associate Degree in Engineering to employees at OneSteel. Not only is this addressing the demand for skilled engineers in South Australia, it is an example of providing access to tertiary education in rural South Australia.

It is my vision that the higher education system will increasingly focus on identifying and assisting able students who perhaps have not been given an opportunity to prepare themselves for higher education. Once they have entered the system, truly equitable outcomes are only achieved if excellence is the benchmark for all.

Conclusion

Appropriately directed and informed by societal needs, including that of business and industry, we will contribute to Australia having the best higher education system in the world, and to Australia becoming the world’s best educated and most innovative, cohesive and sustainable societies. For this vision to materialise, a greater shared commitment to invest in a modernising higher education sector is a necessity. It is a shared responsibility which needs to be driven by a set of relevant KPIs that are informed by Australian needs and not heavily biased towards lagging historical indicators.

Table 1: Government and Business Investment in R&D.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP per capita (US$) 2007 IMF/EIU Forecast</th>
<th>Current Account Balance as % of GDP 2006</th>
<th>GERD as % of GDP 2005</th>
<th>BERD as % of GDP 2005</th>
<th>Number of ‘Top 20’ Unis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>42,553</td>
<td>-5.3</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>57,035</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>44,912</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>47,069</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>56,711</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.14 (2004)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>45,429</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>45,301</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>45,594</td>
<td>-6.6</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REGIONALITY AT LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

As Australia’s first university based outside a capital city, the University of New England has a long tradition of serving the local region and regions elsewhere in Australia and the world. Now the University is turning that tradition into a specialisation with its mission of “Achieving Regional and Global Impact”.

For over half a century UNE has not only provided the broad range of high-quality offerings expected from any university, but has also built significant strength and expertise through attention to a range of regional issues. The University is now capitalising on that expertise by focusing on “regionality” at local, national and international levels.

Why is such a focus necessary? It is no secret that Australian universities have had to respond to major changes in recent decades. Government policy making has seen universities increasingly having to raise their own revenue, while at the same time combating increased levels of competition from the VET sector, private higher education providers and a ‘hot’ job market. Universities have moved from the happy position of being supply driven to having to meet the demands of a competitive marketplace. To do this many universities have been encouraged to diversify, which means that individual institutions increasingly need to specialise – to find their strengths and to excel in them.

While these changes have affected universities across the country, regional universities face particular challenges of their own. The introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism has arguably hit regional universities harder than their metropolitan counterparts. Put simply, the vibrancy of campus life needs to be maintained or even increased.

While this is something we are striving to do at UNE.

Among the other challenges regional universities have had to face is the influence of sustained drought, which has led to a decline in agriculture related enrolments. For many institutions this has led to significant cut backs or even the closure of courses. I am happy to report that this has not been the case at UNE. Indeed, UNE has been able to capitalise on this trend, seeing an increase in agricultural related enrolments due to our recognised expertise in this field.

While regional universities face their particular challenges, they also have advantages over their metropolitan counterparts. UNE is well positioned midway between Brisbane and Sydney in the city of Armidale in the NSW northern tablelands. While much is made of the “town and gown” syndrome, the symbiotic nature of the relationship between a university and the community it serves is often underplayed. Armidale has a real cosmopolitan feel with a café culture and a range highly rated cultural bodies such as the New England Regional Art Museum and New England Conservatorium of Music. In addition, the town has grown into an educational centre with a large number of private and public schools, TAFE and other educational bodies. Students coming to Armidale can expect to have a far lower cost of living than students studying in metropolitan areas and to be able to access the city and university easily, quickly and cheaply. Of course, our staff also find this a lifestyle attractive and can rest assured that Armidale is set to continue as a growing regional centre.

UNE’s regional location also necessitated its pioneering role in the development and provision of distance education. Our reputation for distance education delivery is deservedly high and the University is committed to maintaining a leading-edge status in this field. Distance education students make up approximately three-quarters of our enrolments and providing them with a rewarding educational experience on their own terms is a priority for us.

On-campus there are many distinctive features of UNE that our alumni remember fondly, not the least of these is the residential ‘village’. All have their distinctive characters and all contribute to the culture of the town and University communities. For many of our on-campus students, college life is the stand-out experience of their education at UNE. UNE’s geographical position is unique in Australia, allowing students to study in a broad range of climates, ecosystems and agricultural practices than other universities within hours of the campus.

So what concrete steps has UNE taken to respond to the challenges facing it? A recent academic reorganisation is helping the University to realise its vision by fostering more interdisciplinary collaboration and allowing students and staff a more flexible approach to the pursuit of innovative new directions. This reorganisation has been complemented by a number of high-level executive and academic appointments from Australia and overseas, thus building on the foundations laid by past and present staff.

While maintaining our traditional courses, placing priority on regional needs, issues and interactions will allow the University to provide increasing levels of leadership at local, national and international levels through effective contributions to regional areas in collaboration with communities, business and government.

In the New England and North West region the University is committed to pursuing two-way information exchanges between itself and the community it serves. At a national level its expertise is already recognised as leading the way in many issues affecting regional Australia. UNE is also reaching out globally by contributing career-ready graduates and a prominent, robust Australian and international portfolio of research, education, business and community activity.

The School of Rural Medicine, which took in its first cohort of 61 students this year, is an obvious example of the way in which this strategic direction translates into real-world outcomes. While the School of Rural Medicine will produce doctors who can practise anywhere, it was founded on the principle that over half of the doctors who study in regional areas stay in regional areas to practise. Providing such a course requires a lot of money and some lateral thinking. The Bachelor of Medicine was made possible through the establishment of the Joint Medical Program (JMP), being an expansion of the highly successful University of Newcastle medical program in partnership with UNE and the Hunter New England Health and Northern Sydney Central Coast Health services.
Flinders is operating within a fascinating economic and social environment. To my knowledge, South Australia is the only place in the world where you have a declining traditional manufacturing base - in the shape of the motor vehicle industry, for example – in relatively close geographical and jurisdictional proximity to a booming mining and energy sector. And that resources development is occurring within a heightened appreciation of climate change and environmental protection. At the same time, SA is establishing a strong foundation for defence-related manufacturing with all of its electronic sophistication and service requirements.

How does a university like Flinders best deliver the education outcomes required for an economy in transition? And how does it do so when the institution itself is considering new approaches to teaching and research against a backdrop of changing government policy?

I would like us to step up and, in the spirit of the Flinders’ inaugural Vice-Chancellor, Peter Karmel, “experiment and experiment boldly” to:

➢ reemphasise Flinders’ founding ethos of inclusivity by reaching out to people and communities who do not normally aspire to a university education and by being willing to deliver education in potentially new ways;

➢ rebuild Flinders’ research reputation without diminishing our commitment to high quality teaching; and

➢ position Flinders as a distinctive, valued and recognised contributor to South Australian higher education, the Australian university system and the global university community.

In doing so, we have identified five key objectives:

➢ Positioning Flinders;

➢ Making people a strategic priority;

➢ Sharpening our research profile;

➢ Increasing our attractiveness to students; and

➢ Maximising the use of available resources.

In positioning Flinders for the future we must break with the past and bring new thinking and attitudes to the table. The idea that we encourage people to cross boundaries - whether disciplinary, geographical, racial, ethnic or social - and to be comfortable in doing so, seems to me to resonate well with our founding philosophies and ethos. It is also vital to the future of Australia and the globe, since none of the major challenges we face are the preserve of any one profession or discipline.

Other features of a higher public profile for the University should include a strengthened commitment to the environment and sustainability and the establishment of a presence in Adelaide’s CBD.

People are the core of every organisation but particularly a university. Without creative, committed and high performing staff (and, it must be said, students) no university can excel and maintain its place in global higher education.

However, there are a number of issues that warrant serious attention, including:

➢ workloads and workload planning and policies;

➢ recruitment strategies, staff development, retention and succession planning;

➢ flexibility for academic staff to focus more differentially, where appropriate, on teaching or research; and

➢ performance management and performance-based rewards, including performance pay or bonuses and non-monetary rewards.
These can be addressed incrementally or we can be bold and ask whether the current nature and scope of both academic and general staff positions serves a university or the individuals involved well.

Currently, academic staff are expected to both teach and research, as well as undertake professional performance (including service to the community) and administrative duties. In reality, not all staff maintain an active and productive research profile and there are a number of reasons for this. Some staff prefer to focus on excellence and innovation in their teaching. In professionally-oriented disciplines, there is an overwhelming necessity to provide a professionally-connected education. In areas where cutting-edge research is expensive, some staff may face difficulties in securing adequate research funding. Other staff may simply struggle to produce the kind of sustained high-quality research output that we expect in an internationally benchmarked university.

The ‘compacts’ mooted by the Federal Government are likely to lead to a university being funded more explicitly, transparently and (importantly) accountably for its activities in research, teaching and community engagement.

Through my discussions with Flinders’ staff I believe that it is time to challenge the notion that every academic should be expected to contribute constantly across all areas of activity. In particular, it is time to introduce more flexibility into the definition of academic positions to allow staff, subject to some obvious constraints in terms of ensuring our ability to meet our overall teaching and research profile and obligations, to follow a career path based on excellence in teaching or excellence in research or a combination of both. For this to be done fairly and equitably, appropriate adjustments will need to be made to the University’s policies on workload, staff development, study leave, rewards, promotion and performance management.

On the research front, Flinders established 17 Areas of Strategic Research Investment (ASRIs) four years ago. While the ASRI initiative was a catalyst for new thinking about research and research capability and has had a positive impact, there is scope for a further refining of our research focus in the search for sustainability.

Some ASRIs need to be wound up, others merge and some should become ‘light houses’ of Flinders research activity. These should represent areas of Flinders’ research activity that are externally recognised for their innovation, quality and impact; potentially ‘hubs’ in the ‘hubs-and-spokes’ model of research proposed by Federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr.

The ASRIs should not be the only strategy for increasing our research capacity. We will also need to think through how highly productive single scholars and small teams can continue to be supported and, particularly, how we nurture early career researchers and new areas of potential importance. Such strategies will be instrumental in ensuring our future reputation for research excellence.

Student education is our raison d’être and I think it is time for a significant rethink of undergraduate education at Flinders with the aim of increasing applications for our courses. Accordingly, I have instituted a critical review of degree programs with particular consideration of such questions as:

- allowing automatic second year entry to Flinders’ (high TER) professional courses from the generalist degrees if students complete their first year with a sufficiently high Grade Point Average (GPA), and
- allowing faster progression by an expanded summer school, teaching over more weeks in the year or more in the evening.

In a competitive employment marketplace, even with the current skill shortages, ‘work-ready’ graduates are highly sought – a fact confirmed by the popularity, with employers and students alike, of Flinders’ 20 week industry placement in the Bachelor of Engineering. More generally, I endorse the broad concept of work-integrated learning that encompasses working for the public good and in community and other socially-engaged settings.

Our attractiveness to students depends not only on the courses we offer and the quality of our teaching but also the whole student experience. Unfortunately, Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) has detracted from some aspects of campus life enjoyed in earlier times. While VSU is unlikely to be repealed, it is pleasing that the Commonwealth has the quality of the student experience on its agenda.

If one reflects, it was not that long ago when students had much more flexibility at university, an opportunity to change their mind and switch from surveying to screen studies or arts to engineering. That flexibility ought to be part and parcel of a university education and it worries me that those opportunities for many students have now been squeezed by the financial realities of life in the early 21st century. I am keen to see what we might do to enhance the student experience at Flinders.

One element of Flinders that I am pleased to see has not changed is its positive attitude to equity, inclusion and social justice. This side of Flinders character is alive and well and contributes to the important role of higher education, which is to allow people to grow.

On a broader canvass, I think it is important to note that while South Australia’s three domestic universities do compete with each other, we are, collectively, a significant part of the State’s intellectual infrastructure. We have a responsibility to work together to market Adelaide as a ‘university city’, and provide the teaching and research outcomes required in the local economy and beyond. In that regard, I am very pleased with the Flinders-University of South Australia recent ‘pathways to engineering’ collaboration which sees both institutions working to their respective strengths. Students will be able to study for the first two years of some engineering degrees at one university and then transfer to the other institution at a point where the tuition becomes more specialised to a particular field.

Such innovation and collaboration will be further required as Australia’s status as an excellent educator comes under even greater pressure in a globalised higher education market.

Challenges loom and opportunities beckon in the months and years ahead. It is a very stimulating and rewarding time to be in the higher education business.
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Professor Peter Hoj, Vice-Chancellor & President, University of South Australia
Darrell Mann, Director, Systematic Innovation
Dr Stella Clark, CEO, The Bio21 Cluster
Professor Mark Dodgson, Director, Technology & Innovation Management Centre, University of Queensland
Patrick Coleman, Policy Director, Business Council of Australia
Tony Pensabene, Chief Economist, Ai Group
Bradley Smith, Executive Director, Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies
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THE PLEASURE AND PAIN OF A VICE-CHANCELLOR

Over the twelve years of my vice-chancellorship at the University of Sydney our budget has increased by 125% and the guaranteed government component has decreased by 25% (using unadjusted dollar figures). As of now the largest component of our income is student fees, narrowly ahead of research earnings. Both are roughly one third of income and government operating grant accounts for roughly one sixth.

These numbers give a vivid picture of the changes in an internationally-focussed research-intensive Australian university. It is remarkable that we continue to fare well and, indeed, improve in international league tables.

What gives pleasure and pain to a contemporary vice-chancellor of a university such as mine? I will keep returning to the question. The core task is to run a $1.5 billion operation with some 6,000 staff and 47,000 students. For several years it was common to be told that one would find things more difficult in the ‘real world’ where efficiency matters, but recently I was asked if I had ever been an academic!

Much is condensed in that story. I believe that the biggest danger facing Australian universities is an externally driven move towards managerialism. With a system spread too thin and over-uniform mission statements which all have a hint of Harvard’s, there is a tendency to focus on garnering resources and driving efficiencies which would allow us to attain lofty goals if only we could remember them. Incidentally I have just read an article by Stephen Ellis (Australian May 15, ’08) in which he quotes critics as asking, “Is Harvard just a tax-free hedge fund with a school tacked on as a way to solicit new money?” The problem may be universal!

Needless to say, I believe that I have tried to do better. When VSU legislation prevented us levying even an amenities fee, I committed to supporting our student organisations and through them the all-round campus experience. Over the first two years the University of Sydney will have provided $30m to enhance and preserve sport, debating, drama, student advocacy through student-run entities. The University is rated top in the nation by the National Union of Students for its encouragement of activities outside the classroom.

We continue to invest heavily in improving the learning and teaching environment especially the first-year experience and opportunities for choice. Yet we have almost completed a $200m plus building program with a new Law School, new IT Building and a Student Centre which also incorporates facilities for alumni.

There is pain in setting these priorities, and doing so in a manner which optimises community engagement, but there is pleasure when our students win the World Debating Championships, dominate NSW club rugby and become articulate well-balanced citizens.

The University’s reputation relies greatly on its research achievements. Outcomes, particularly in ARC Discovery, are second to none and we continue to recruit outstanding minds. There is frustration too, because basic infrastructure – the buildings to house the laboratories, the spaces to bring together expanding research teams – is difficult to fund. Moreover Australian research grants carry negative on-costs, in the sense that the institution is regularly called upon for a contribution, so that in an obtuse way we are punished for success. Necessary equipment is often partially funded and salaries for those employed on research projects are set at notional national rates below our standard levels. We do, of course, receive block grant funding based on research performance but a large part of this must be deployed strategically to anticipate the future not only to bolster mature activity.

It is a pleasure to encourage new research initiatives and to congratulate those who are successful. It is painful that average national success rates in competitive schemes are low and that re-motivation forms a necessary part of encouragement.

The University seeks to serve the interests of both Commonwealth and State, but is also committed to international engagement. We are the first and only university to have held a graduation celebration in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing and have many individual agreements for research collaboration and student exchange. I believe also in the value of international networks of research-intensive universities and, having served as President of Academic Consortium 21, am now completing a term as Chair of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities. There are tangible benefits in the form of international benchmarking projects and research consortia.

Having sketched the operating environment let me make some more personal observations. The true satisfaction from working as a vice-chancellor comes from the simple fact that one can achieve more by empowering others than by running one’s own race. It is the case that I have maintained active mathematical research (luckily I need no elaborate laboratories or equipment) but this is subordinate to the main task in hand. My aspiration has always been to be a level 5 leader as described by Jim Collins in his book ‘Good to Great’.

The ideal is to be fiercely ambitious but to channel that into ambition for the institution, to have a strong ego but to use that to avoid the need to strut or be praised. It is important that this is an ideal – to claim that one had attained it would prove that one had not!

Some of these personality characteristics may be necessary to cope with the complex frustrations of the job. Universities are increasingly required to act in a business-like manner but have a governance structure which grows out of collegiality and has as much of the flavour of parliament as it does of a company board.

As major policy decisions need to be owned by the university community, which includes students, staff and alumni, our apparently cumbersome structures may well be a blessing in disguise. On the other hand it is deeply frustrating when individual members of the governing body pursue minutiae. Sometimes Senate meetings become the Theatre of the Absurd and potentially good contributors are driven away by the apparent pettiness of it all. Moreover, as Henry Kissinger famously remarked, academic politics can be truly vicious because so little is at stake. That is already a reframing of his words, and I would go further and claim that academic politics becomes vicious when little is at stake. I have found that, on the big issues, people behave well – but there is an unholy
obsession with small ones.

Politics for a vice-chancellor is not merely internal and for almost all of my term I have worked with a Labor state government and a Liberal coalition federal government. The former has the potential to exert influence through the governance structure and the latter through rules attached to funding. I have taken the view that one should speak out in any case, particularly when academic freedom is involved. It has always seemed to me that media-savvy politicians have an advantage in attacking individual academics and that a vice-chancellor is obliged to step up to the plate.

There is a painful frustration, however, in another situation when complaints are raised against staff or staff are in dispute with the institution. We must obviously protect all parties and refrain from engaging in trial by media. Yet this can make universities appear secretive, even arbitrary, and unwilling to deny misleading speculation. There is a maze of well-intentioned legislation, concerning privacy, protected disclosures and freedom of information, whose navigation can be a nightmare. Universities, and by extension vice-chancellors, must be strong in order to endure looking weak.

That comment brings us back to Jim Collins and leadership. In fact I believe the demands on a vice-chancellor are changing and that Australian Higher Education is moving more towards the US model (even as that model is being tested on home ground). In particular, the US university president plays an externally focussed role in many respects. She or he spends time on fund-raising, on political lobbying and on forging links with corporations and is relatively detached from the academic programs and often from the financial decisions. In many US universities another senior officer, usually called the Provost, runs the machinery. At Sydney I have introduced an embryonic structure along such lines.

An alternative trend which may be developing in Australia is for the role of Chancellor to evolve towards a presidential one in the US sense. Our tradition, borrowed from the UK, is to have a Chancellor who confers degrees on behalf of the collegial governing council which she/he chairs, who presides at ceremonial occasions but is not actively engaged in the affairs of the institution. Many modern Australian chancellors, especially those from the business sector, are well able to lobby, to lead fund-raising and to establish external relationships. Thus the Chancellor position could morph into President and the Vice-Chancellor position into Provost.

Derek Bok, former President of Harvard and brought back briefly from retirement when Larry Summers resigned, wrote a book which I interpreted as warning universities against engaging directly with business. He seemed to suggest that the problems outweighed the gains. That has never been my view and the University of Sydney has several counter-examples to Bok’s position, notably a recent $30m agreement with Rio Tinto for a research centre in mechatronics, which will inter alia develop mining automation.

I confess, however, to frustration with ventures such as B-HERT aimed at developing constructive dialogue between the sectors at a national level. My frustration is an earned one because I have spent several years on the Board and have tried to assist. I have great admiration for Ashley Goldsworthy’s untiring efforts at the helm. Nevertheless there is a problem. In a nutshell, too few Australian business leaders are willing to invest quality time in such a venture and too many university leaders are over-fond of rhetoric.

I trust that the Innovation Review and Kim Carr’s response will lead to government measures to enhance business/university interaction and cooperation. I hope that B-HERT will continue to play a key positive role.

Being often asked if I would encourage someone today to become a vice-chancellor, I have a rehearsed reply. “If you can stand the pain you will have a delightfully stimulating experience. The tasks are so varied and the intellectual challenges so complex that you will have a thrilling time.”

ON GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

After eight and a half years as Vice-Chancellor of the University of New England, followed by (in April 2008) just over two years as Chancellor of the University of Canberra, where I had leaned even as thattive skills as Pro Vice-Chancellor and later Deputy Vice-Chancellor, 1993-1997, there is some expertise, experience, insights to share – the wisdom Ashley hoped for I shall leave for when I am fully retired.

During the past ten years I have become very interested in the overlapping concepts of management, leadership and governance, how management, leadership and governance are played out in a university context, and what their boundaries, if any, are.

During the past fifteen years I have also been watching with interest, participating in, being affected by and initiating structural reforms. The old sociological question: ‘Does form follow function or vice versa?’ has been played out in all universities, and the answer normally confirms the design/architectural principle of form following function.

Governance at the highest level is exercised by the University Council. The University of New England Act gives wide powers to its governing council, including “the control and management of the affairs and concerns of the University”, as does the University of Canberra Act. But in effect ‘management of the affairs and concerns of the University’ is delegated to the Vice-Chancellor, and monitored by the Council. We have seen tensions arise between Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors/Council in establishing the boundaries between the Vice-Chancellor’s delegated management role and the Council’s legal responsibilities and, sometimes, desire to micromanage.

Vice-Chancellors are appointed by the University Council to the senior leadership position, to lead their university from the top, to revitalise it, change its direction, differentiate it from other universities, get it up the league tables etc etc. VC’s have to have a ‘vision’, develop the strategic vision into plan - a plan to make the university attractive to prospective students, to current students, to alumni, to employers and prospective donors, partners, and collaborators; and not least to governments, both state/territory and federal.

In order to achieve this they need Council support, competent managers and receptive staff. Staff too, do look for this vision, and an exciting vision well presented which captures staff’s imagination can energise and excite staff and can make staff accept even unpalatable changes.

EMERITUS PROFESSOR INGRID MOSES
Vice-Chancellor, University of New England
1 July 1997 - 6 January 2006
Usually the first changes are structural. We have all made them. Sometimes the structure really needed changing because it hindered, not helped communication and accountability, synergy and collaboration. Sometimes structural change is used to enable the VC to get a new executive team and senior management team together, often the first step in realising the vision.

The Council might be actively involved in options for restructure or mainly endorse the VC’s proposals.

I have experienced in a senior management / executive or leadership role four different Chancellors and each saw their own role and that of Council somewhat differently. The roles each occupied ranged from mainly intellectual input and chairing of Council meetings to questioning all decisions made by senior management and initiating reviews and audits. The manifest behaviour ranged from complete trust in senior management to complete mistrust. Both behaviours are, I believe, incompatible with good governance.

Good governance can also be the casualty of restructuring. Decision making used to be collegial, exercised through departmental or school boards and meetings; faculty boards, and Academic Board. Heads, Deans and Chairs of Academic Board occupied these positions for a term or two and then rejoined their academic colleagues. The professionalisation of university academic management has occurred concurrently with, partly in response to, increased calls for efficiency and effectiveness, evaluation of performance and accountability since the 1980’s. The proliferation of Pro and Deputy Vice-Chancellor positions with specific university-wide portfolios cuts across that collegial decision-making – boards and committees are not accountable, they are not held accountable; individuals are. Academic Boards have lost much of their influence in the new era, even though they might be provided for in the University Act, as in the University of Canberra Act.

While the Vice-Chancellor provides leadership, leadership and management is also delegated to members of the Senior Management/Executive team. The formal relationship, between the Pro/Deputy Vice-Chancellors and the Executive Deans or PVCs of academic divisions, between the Pro/Deputy Vice-Chancellors and the Academic Board, between the Pro/Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Executive Deans or PVCs of academic divisions and the CFO or COO is crucial.

At the University of New England there was, when I joined it, role confusion as to leadership, management and internal governance responsibilities. Academic Board had made some decisions, endorsed by Council, which had far reaching and unforeseen consequences and impact on enrolment and finances. There was a profusion of committees – many called ‘Vice-Chancellor’s Advisory Committee’, but they never advised me.

In contrast, the Council under the leadership of the Chancellor Pat O’Shane had already looked at how it functioned and exercised its oversight over management, had found it wanting and acted. With the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor, myself, an era of strict separation of governance and management began with explicit requirements for comprehensive reporting to Council.

Within months of my taking up the position we reviewed the committee system. The outcome was, accepted by Academic Board and Council, that we more than halved the number of committees and changed their terms of reference and membership. The key committees were to be chaired by a Pro Vice-Chancellor with personal accountability for that area, ie research and academic.

I wrote a paper for Academic Board articulating the responsibilities of the Board and of the Senior Executive, and principles for collaboration, providing an historical and contemporary context.

We needed to create new mechanisms to deal with the many external linkages initiated by individual academics, schools and faculties. In terms of entrepreneurial activities the University had operated under an organized anarchy model – it energised people, but the legal implications, the reputational risks, the financial consequences were considerable.

We changed our decision-making structures to facilitate academic work in a changed environment and to accommodate the external expectations and demands. We tried to free academics from unnecessary or unproductive committee work; instead we tried to inform them adequately of developments, to consult them during policy development, and to involve them in policy approval via the collegial channels which were still functioning. We tried to be transparent and fair, but did not shirk decisions.

We noted that policy decisions made by Academic Board and/or Senior Management were not always implemented, and we introduced a Teaching Quantum which made a portion of the faculty operational grants conditional on the implementation of ten specific policies/procedures/achievements.

So we changed functions and forms, structures and processes. This was important in our modernisation process of the University.

But governance, leadership, management is dependent on people who will accept governance, leadership and management. All are interactive processes, and while we changed structures, we knew that the incumbents of these management and executive positions were more important.

The Vice-Chancellor, while responsible for his or her senior executive, indeed for the whole of manage-ment, to the Council, needs to have as senior executives and senior managers people he or she can trust – colleagues who are themselves outstanding in their professional competence and management, who share the vision and are committed to ensuring that the part for which they are responsible is realised.

Vice-Chancellors, if they have been recruited from elsewhere, will, after some time when the vision has crystallised, the colleagues have been assessed, have to make the hard decision: is the team the right team? If not, a restructure is likely and some redundancies.

I restructured at UNE and we continuously within the senior group evaluated the structure, and we evaluated each other through 360 degree evaluations. The Council had been happy or accepting of my proposals. With the structures in place, governance clarified, good managers in place, the future of the University seemed assured. But a new Chancellor wanted a different structure.

At UNE and now at the University of Canberra, as it was also at the University of Queensland and UTS, the other two universities I worked at, in the end it is the academic work of academics which gains national or international reputation in research and teaching. Therefore much of the work we did was focused on staff and students.

At UNE, with the support of Council, we tried to foster opportunities for research and for research collaboration, for gaining research grants, for developing teaching and courses, and we celebrated achievements in teaching, research, service and equity initiatives. We tried to create an environment in which staff and students could excel and be accepted and valued in their differences. We were an early Employer of Choice for Women; we had leadership and mentoring programs.

We all believed that UNE was a unique university with its close-
knit small campus community and large numbers of external students. And good governance, leadership, and management did not just serve to facilitate academics’ work; we wanted our on-campus students in particular to be engaged and develop as future professional and civic leaders. We looked at our students, where they came from and where they were likely to end up. I instituted the UNE Country Scholarship Scheme which funded annually for the duration of their degree course 30 commencing regional students who were both good academically and had shown leadership qualities and activities in their high school years.

We developed a leadership course for on-campus students in which they gained self-knowledge, and time, project, interpersonal and self-management skills. This eventually became part of a more ambitious project, the New England Award, under the leadership of Robyn Muldoon. Engagement with the community, work experience, overseas placements, participation in the leadership course, and in many more services, and in voluntary and cultural activities thus became certified and celebrated at graduation. It took some time for Council to accept our wish to acknowledge the Award at graduations, but Council eventually did. The New England Award will be a welcome addition to the Australian Higher Education Graduate Statement which all graduates will soon receive.

As a VC we do not only develop and implement the mission, mentor and support, facilitate and fund, inspire and are inspired by academic or professional competence and excellence. I acknowledge and was nourished by the humanity of many of my colleagues, both academic and general.

As a VC we are accountable to Council, and here, too, the qualities of Council members and the Chancellor rather than the size of the Council or its committee system mattered most. I was privileged to have worked with some outstanding Council members and a supportive Chancellor.

Together as a university community we achieved a lot, pulling back the University of New England from the brink of collapse and restoring a sense of pride and future. But we could have done so much more internally, locally, nationally and internationally had we only had more funds.

UNVEILING A VISION

“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times”. My apologies to Dickens but these lines are an apt description of the context in which I took up my appointment as Vice-Chancellor of Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. The good news was that higher education was once more on the national agenda as a significant driver of the knowledge economy and this would create demand for our “services”. The bad news was despite growing student numbers Commonwealth funding would be cut; and a user-pays philosophy would prevail. Universities were expected to both frame their own future and fund it.

The University Council had made it clear that they looked to my appointment as a means by which to transform ECU into a modern and progressive university, with a distinctive academic profile and differentiated mission. ECU’s history was a collection of teachers colleges, amalgamated into a single institution and designated a university in 1991. Its past had been bruising at times and, while I realized the institution probably hoped for a calm and non-challenging future, sheer survival meant that ECU had to find the means to thrive. I had learnt the value of both continuity and change during my long years in the sector. Now, however, it was time for change.

My focus on this imperative was forcefully fractured by a tactical move on the part of another WA university. It was a testing time. The VC from Murdoch University was making a strategic move to takeover ECU’s campus at Bunbury, 200 kilometres south of Perth. There was some support at the south-west campus for a Murdoch takeover. In the city internal opinion at the University was divided between the “let it go” and the “hold on at all cost” camps. My weeks were spent in negotiation with Canberra, the State, Murdoch University and its Chancellor and my own Council.

The campus takeover bid was an unwelcome diversion but it served as a valuable learning experience about the local, federal and state politics of higher education in WA. Bunbury campus had been built by the state government but had never been given federal funding for student places. Murdoch wanted the state-
funded campus together with the federally funded places ECU had assigned to Bunbury! This proposed takeover (without any talk of compensation for the loss of some twenty million dollars in assets) presented an opportunity for a strategic look at campus consolidation and the rural and regional outreach of ECU. It also made me aware of the reputational damage that could result from losing such a major asset to a local competitor.

I soon realized my time as VC at ECU was not going to be easy in the state and national context. But I was fast learning to be duck-like: serene on the surface but paddling methodically and with determination beneath the surface. Importantly, I learnt not to take my eye off the big goal – the transformation of ECU – concentrating on, to use Spillman’s phrase, “Raising Edith”.

Resistance to planning for change came from within. I tabled at Council a comprehensive set of proposals for a strategic planning process. It was immediately opposed by staff representatives on Council who saw this as “yet another review.” Staff were wary. Some assumed, perhaps hopefully, that a plan would be produced and find its way to a shelf somewhere to be forgotten. Others distrusted the very idea of strategic planning fearing change and disruption to the status quo. I understood the concerns of staff and engaged in measured logical explanation of the differences between reviews and planning. I knew that academics could be persuaded by sound and constructive arguments. Eventually the proposals received unanimous support from Academic Board and Council.

Following acceptance of the proposal to engage in comprehensive planning a spirit of engagement with the process was beginning to emerge. A Strategic Planning Committee linking University Council with the planning process was established. These were good times partly because of Council and stakeholder buy-in, but also because knowledgeable external consultants worked in partnership with highly competent, influential and trusted internal staff. This team was tasked with a gargantuan set of planning and consultation processes. These involved submissions (open to all); regular road shows at all campuses for communication, feedback and debate. I had learnt to be open with staff and Council members, as I worked on the premise that we all could see the importance of what we were doing to all our futures.

But turbulent times were brewing as the recommendations started emerging and were acted upon – campus consolidation (divesting the Claremont Campus which was much loved by Alumni); restructuring senior management to provide new leadership; Faculty reconfiguration (reduction in the number of schools and faculties and a reshaping of the academic profile); a new focus on service, professionalism and enterprise (hotly contested); budget reformulation (to underpin strengths and grow new initiatives) – to name a few of the major changes happening simultaneously. Change was no longer being proposed and planned for – it was actually happening. I learnt the importance of moving quickly and keeping up momentum. In times of rapid change people need to see strength and determination. I also learnt to address “white-anting” decisively and constructively. I became known for my “relentless leadership”.

As I had worked in several universities, I had experienced cultural differences in the academy. While the core of any university contains much commonality, the cultural differences are palpable as I learnt from my time as DVC at ANU, as PVC at QUT and as a HoD at Monash. An analysis of the culture at QUT and as a HoD at Monash. An analysis of the culture of ECU and its readiness for change revealed the institution was ill-prepared with each campus exhibiting its own village culture. How was I to make headway in what was essentially five mini-universities each with its own priorities? I had long ago learnt the value of “people power” in leading, blocking or resisting change. ECU needed energetic, competent and committed leadership, externally recruited and internally corralled to transform the culture. Much of the progress that ensued was due to new leadership throughout the organization which seemed to re-energise the whole institution. As Spillman reported there was “so much fresh thought, so much drive and energy” and a “real can-do attitude”.

I knew the value of appointing good people to key positions and empowering them. I still believe this is the best kind of leadership any leader can give – to choose staff wisely and then empower, support and nurture them through tough, targeted, but always supportive feedback. If they succeed, you succeed and the institution wins. This is not easy. Different personal needs and strengths emerge; people show differing capacities to work in teams and to work collaboratively.

Empowering and supporting people led to ECU’s success. I encouraged staff to rise to new possibilities for themselves and the institution and to meet the challenges of change by being environmental scanners, strategic thinkers, opportunity makers and takers so that collectively we could “advantageously position the institution and its constituent parts in a deregulated, competitive, international …environment”.

I extolled Robert Kennedy’s insight: “The future is not a gift. It is an achievement”.

But improvements emanating from changes within the internal environment can be quickly overtaken by external influences. As the federal funding environment further worsened, salary savings from within had to be found. A key strategy was to transfer funds from administration to the core business of teaching, learning and research. To address this imperative, corporate services needed to be streamlined. These included finance, human resources, information technology, facilities and student services. An external consultant’s review established an agenda for change with a move to more client-oriented corporate services that were more cost-effective. This required major structural reform.

The process was again inclusive and consultative. The recommendation took two years to implement and two years was too long. It was painful, protracted and unsettling for staff. It raised a key dilemma embedded in all cultural transformation. To what extent do you follow the processes and time-lines suggested by the consultants? At what point does one’s own pragmatic knowledge and experience tighten the time-lines and push the fast forward button? Would insisting on a faster resolution undermine the delegated and empowering model of management I was trying to develop? I had to walk the talk, but these were testing times for all. In retrospect I should have acted more swiftly but ironically, Canberra commissioned a Monograph on these transformations as an example of “best practice in the sector”.

The external environment continued to exert pressure on the University. Risk assessment became the new mantra, especially in relation to fears about the Y2K bug. An expensive and time consuming exercise within the university began with again external consultants developing compliance plans. The Y2K became a hot topic at Council and within the university. Massive resources were expended on hardware, software, systems, and staff development. These fears of a devastating computer virus bled the university of people, money, time and focus.

1 Spillman, K (2006) “Raising Edith: The Transformation of a New Generation University”, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia
2 Ibid p.37
3 Ibid p. 36
4 Poole, Millicent (1997). “Setting the Strategic Direction for Edith Cowan University in the New Millennium” Paper presented to University Council, July 31
Other viruses were also spreading their contagion, diverting the university from its true purposes, and making the times onerous for staff, students and management. Endless new accountabilities and compliance demands descended upon us from federal and state governments, and from various professional registration bodies (a fellow VC at UWA counted 165 for his institution). Then there was AUQA which focussed on quality assurance but sapped precious funds and time into ensuring process compliance. Certainly, AUQA led to many improved and more transparent processes but it also led to a growth in the policy and compliance industry, diverting resources from teaching and research. Council proposed a policy on policies. I was living “Yes Minister” on a daily basis!

The external environment worsened considerably under the Howard government as funding cuts continued. Endless inquiries were held. We were on a treadmill grinding out high quality substantive submissions which we knew would lead to few positive outcomes. Funding became much politicized with all announcements coming from the Minister via local members. A corrosive negativist attitude of the government towards universities damaged morale in the sector as a whole, and led to national and international damage to reputation. Higher education in Australia was seen to be “in crisis” and the influx of international students and local students with lower entry scores was seen to have a negative impact on “the quality of Australian higher education”. An era touted as supporting diversity and access, and espousing mission-based funding, became elitist. Stratified ranking systems diverted funds to special interest groups e.g. the Go8. The fundamental needs of the sector were not addressed, viz a viable base funding model, with a realistic time-frame for all universities. Government’s insistence that Australia must boast one university in the world’s 100 top ranking list distorted university funding allocations.

It was also the worst of times for those wanting to protect the idea of a university and its governance structures. The Menzies liberal and enlightened vision of the role of Australian universities was seriously under siege by Howard’s neo-conservative ideological framework, which at times seemed Orwellian in its silencing of dissent. Universities were reconceptualised as “businesses”, and instruments of the state, whose function was to drive the knowledge economy. Participatory governance models (which included staff and students) had long served universities well but were to be replaced by new governance models based on the corporate sector.

A number of VC’s (including myself) argued that this business model was not appropriate, the not-for-profit sector governance model being better suited to a knowledge-based or learning organization. However, new governance protocols were handed down to universities and to my way of thinking sadly missed the mark. Given the poor outcomes and performance of the corporate sector, it did not seem that this new corporate model would lead to quality outcomes or improved performance. Indeed it already exhibits all sorts of conflicts of interest and role confusion. The old adage “noses in, fingers out” is being replaced by a culture of micro-managing the “managers”.

Despite these debilitating times, there were many celebratory times within ECU as our transformation led to major outcomes nationally and internationally. We celebrated campus consolidation with a moving pipe band ceremony to exit Claremont; and a state of the art Son et Lumiere event to celebrate the opening of our new university headquarters at Joondalup. (Later Rolf Harris performed here for us in a concert to link past and present). We celebrated a series of productive partnerships – with the police and TAFE on our joint Joondalup Learning Precinct; with UWA to bring festival films to Joondalup and encourage the community onto campus; we celebrated our famous Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and its new creative arts precinct with schools and TAFE (and boasted about our famous alumni such as Hugh Jackman and Rolf Harris); we celebrated our national and international awards for innovative architecture and ecologically friendly energy practices; we celebrated our Marketing and Development team who kept winning national and international awards three years in a row; we celebrated numerous research grants, most of all we celebrated our students and staff and their commitment and drive to transform ECU.

We celebrated our extraordinary increase in international students and the cultural richness they brought us. We celebrated all our precincts and all our partnerships. Had there been “world enough and time” we could have celebrated the outcome of our special partnership with IBM to transform our pedagogy through a well-constructed project entitled “The ECU Advantage” which gave us access to IBM’s research and innovation in teaching and learning and partnerships with various North American partners who had pioneered the approach. But time ran out and we needed two more years to properly embed this major intellectual project.

So what wisdom might be distilled from my experiences during these best and worst of times? The wisdom I would like to pass on to all those who have the privilege of being a VC is this: Transform your university to be responsive to the times but never forget “The Idea of a University”, with all its rich contextual and historical roots, and all its future possibilities. During my period as VC intellectual freedom diminished along with funding. A university as a space to create, experiment, debate, critique, challenge, was seriously constrained by the Howard government. I hope Rudd (the intellectual, the internationalist, not the bureaucrat) will re-dress this.

I feel that we as a nation and as a world are at a threshold, much like the one captured in Elizabeth Johnston’s recent Installation (QPAC, 2008) “This installation is about the line. The line that is positioned just before things turn. The threshold. It’s about walking to that place, like a pilgrim looking for that spot where the view is both satisfyingly near and distant – with fear on a lead you can sense you’re OK if you stay anchored.” Please Prime Minister Rudd and Minister Gillard stay anchored in the idea of a university. Show foresight and hindsight. Build universities into you education revolution and lift the threshold of funding and intellectual freedom to achieve an inclusive and innovative society. Strengthen the “idea of a university” to help us face extremely threatening but challenging times. As you would know, PM, the Chinese word for crisis also means opportunity. You can make a difference. So can Australia Universities.

Selected readings –


Poole, Millicent E. (1999) “Re-framing higher education: mind the market” *Dialogue, Academy of the Social Sciences*

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5 In 1939 Menzies posed a very important question and answered it: “What...are we to look for in a true university? What causes should it serve? First, the university should be a home of pure culture and learning...Second...a training school for the professions. Third...a liaison between the academic and the “good practical man”...Fourth...the home for research...Fifth...a trainer of character...Sixth...a training ground for leaders...Seventh...a custodian of mental liberty and the unfiltered source for truth.”
The first Rudd budget has a focus on education in its Building Australia Fund with some apparent injection of funds into university infrastructure, research and scholarships. This is a promising beginning. However, the Rudd budget also fails to address the real issue for universities – base funding per student and a mechanism for salary adjustments that goes beyond the principle of an efficiency dividend and provides realistic indexation.
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Dear Sirs,

2007 R-HEQF Awards — Award for Outstanding Philanthropic Support of Higher Education: High Commendation Mr Ron Diamond, Central Queensland University...

"You are old...the young man said”; indeed at 87 years of age, I am at least getting that way. Even so, I have neglected my obligation to acknowledge your generosity of spirit in awarding me “High Commendation”. Reluctantly, I do so now; thank you.

It may interest you to know that I believe that my wife Helen’s and my support to Central Queensland University went beyond money as we quietly, unknown publicly, played a major part in highlighting administrative deficiencies in that establishment now in process of remedy - deficiencies of which we would never have been aware if we had not established the science scholarships in the name of my brother Jim (R.J.).

Additional then to your ‘generosity of spirit’, was that of the University in nominating me for a R-HEQF award.

With our best wishes,
Sincerely,

Ron Diamond


"There is nothing new under the sun except the history you don't know" — Harry S Truman
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B-HERT is the only body where leaders of Australia’s business, research, professional and academic communities come together to address important issues of common concern, to improve the interaction between Australian business and higher education institutions, and to help guide the future directions of higher education.

In pursuing this mission BHERT aims to influence public opinion and government policy on selected issues of importance.

B-HERT believes that a prerequisite for a more prosperous and equitable society in Australia is a more highly-educated community. In material terms it fosters economic growth and improved living standards - through improved productivity and competitiveness with other countries. In terms of equity, individual Australians should have the opportunity to realise their full social, cultural, political and economic potential.

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