



THE AUSTRALIAN
ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES

28 July 2008

Professor Denise Bradley, AC
C/- The Secretariat
Review of Australian Higher Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Professor Bradley,

Please find attached the Academy's submission to the Government's Review of Australian Higher Education 2008.

The Academy is able to offer expert advice on the needs, attributes and contribution of the humanities within the Australian higher education and research sector. There are parts of the Discussion Paper that are clearly geared towards other kinds of expertise, and that bear on matters on which we do not have a particular policy. This applies particularly to some of the questions addressed to institutional arrangements. Where these have implications for the humanities, of course, we offer a view; but we have restricted our commentary to those issues where our particular expertise sheds light.

The Academy is grateful for the opportunity to contribute its ideas to this important Review. We would be pleased to elaborate on any of our observations and suggestions should the Panel find it helpful.

Please refer any enquiries in the first instance to the Executive Director, John Byron.

With kind regards,

Professor Ian Donaldson FAHA FBA FRSE
President

**Submission
to the
Review of Australian Higher Education**

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Confidentiality: No part of this submission is confidential

Declarations of Interest:

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Professor Ian Donaldson is the President of the Academy. He is Honorary Professorial Fellow in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. He was founding Director of the ANU's Humanities Research Centre from 1974 to 1990, and directed the Centre again from 2004 to 2007. He was founding Director of Cambridge University's Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) from 2001 to 2003.

Dr John Byron has been the Academy's Executive Director since 2003. He is an Adjunct Research Fellow in the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University; a member of the Governing Council of Old Parliament House; the Secretary/Treasurer of the Association for Medical Humanities (Australia and New Zealand); and a Board member of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. He has been President of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (2001) and Senior Project Officer for the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (2002-3).

Chapter 1 Higher education in modern Australia

1. *How adequate is the statement of functions and characteristics of higher education in modern Australia?*

The Academy is satisfied that the statements on the place, functions and characteristics of higher education in modern Australia are reasonably accurate and comprehensive, at this necessarily general level. We have a few suggestions to develop further this conceptualisation.

1.1 The place...

The examples of areas in which investment in our higher education system do or will pay off correctly focus on the benefits of industrial, economic, technical and policy expertise, and the benefits of cultural knowledge and values, and of strong social and cultural institutions to Australia's social, cultural and democratic fabric are rightly mentioned.

The concluding paragraph argues that the higher education system's 'traditional role remains critical and relevant' (p.1). We recognise that the word *critical* is meant here in the sense 'vital or essential,' and we agree with this assessment. However the word reminds us of the higher education sector's role in the intellectual sense of *critical*: to offer critique of social, cultural, political, economic, scientific and technical developments. While not necessarily negative (that other common sense of the word), such expert criticism should be frank, fearless and evidence-based: it is not always comfortable or welcome, but it is essential to the proper functioning of a democratic civil society. The higher education system is by no means the only avenue for such critique (a free and unbiased press is another crucial element, as is the community sector), but its participation is an essential component of the matrix of checks and balances that keep a democracy running properly.

1.2 The function...

The Academy generally agrees with those functions of contemporary universities that are identified in the Discussion Paper, particularly when another core function of universities, community engagement, is addressed in detail in section 3.7. We regard this as a core function in its own right, alongside the two functions identified in this opening section.

The Academy applauds the inclusion of – and, indeed, the priority accorded to – the first benefit of knowledge and skills acquisition, which advances 'self-fulfilment, personal development and the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself throughout an individual's life' (p.2). The notion that it is a social good for citizens to become more fulfilled, capable and actively engaged in their society has not always been supported in the policy debate, and we warmly welcome this stance. We agree wholeheartedly and urge the Expert Panel to hold onto this view.

We also recognise the importance of vocational and professional training, oriented towards the acquisition of specific skills and techniques (as outlined in the second benefit). A related key benefit of higher education teaching and learning is the acquisition of higher-order, transferable 'generic' skills in analysis, communication, critique, scientific scepticism, debate and philosophical argument. These help produce

graduates who are nimble, lateral, highly competent problem-solvers in novel situations. While we respect the role of higher education (in partnership with vocational education and training) in training work-ready professionals equipped with industry-specific skills, we also recognise the value to industry, society and the individual learner of the acquisition of generic skills that endure well beyond the redundancy of specific technical skill-sets, and that equip graduates with the ability to keep learning and contributing effectively.

It is our view that it would be beneficial to foreground the value of these fundamental transferable skills at this stage of setting out the context for closer discussion of the higher education sector. We suggest the inclusion, under the opening dot-point on p.2, of a new second sub-point (so 1.2.1.b, if you like) that reads:

- to produce a sophisticated graduate population equipped with high-level, transferable skills in analysis, critique, communication and problem-solving, to support industry needs for highly-transferable decision-makers, as well as individual and social needs for career development, life-long learning, and active citizenship;

1.3 The characteristics...

Following on from that point, we think that the characteristics section needs to elucidate an additional capacity (p.2): ‘produce graduates equipped for high-level, sophisticated patterns of lifelong learning, employability and active citizenship.’

The Academy would also like to see the inclusion of another capacity, ‘to address needs in areas of identified national interest’, where these do not coincide with labour market needs or the interests of industry. Matters not relating directly to market needs or the interests of industry might include questions relating (for example) to linguistic and cultural practice, historical and religious understanding, creative activity, social tolerance, and ethical conduct. These areas require intervention directed by national policy, where the imperatives are not driven by student demand, labour force needs or industry requirements. This is a legitimate area of current and probable future policy intervention, but is not explicitly canvassed in the system description. An absence of non-market considerations in the enumeration of factors providing teaching, learning and research ‘pull’ is likely to skew the system redesign priorities to national disadvantage.

Section 3.1 Meeting labour market and industry needs

2. *Are there impediments to the higher education sector being able to innovate in the development of courses and programs? What are these impediments and how could they be removed?*

The single most onerous impediment to course development in the higher education sector is the imposition of a marginally applicable competition model. The sector has developed inefficient practices (looked at sector-wide), endured a boom-and-bust pattern of course bloat and flight as institutions chase the perceived mainstream or next big thing (IT, for example), and permitted the neglect of key enabling disciplines when they are out of fashion. Much of this is driven by an overly literal adoption of a Darwinist business model to the higher education sector. A significant degree of

competition is healthy, to be sure, and has always existed in the sector. However the university system has also always relied heavily on collaboration and collegiality. Indeed, this is a key driver of efficiency in the sector (particularly important in a small country): ironically, efficiency is one of the victims of a poorly conceived over-enthusiasm for competition.

This impediment will be ameliorated by an intelligent, strategic, whole-of-sector approach being taken when university compacts are negotiated. It should also be borne in mind when any new funding arrangements are being designed. Freeing universities from the obligation to behave like retailers on the pedestrian mall will enable them, collectively, to better attend to the job the nation entrusts to them: educating people to the highest standard across an appropriately wide and diverse range of subjects.

3. *What are the appropriate mechanisms at the national and local level for ensuring higher education meets national and local needs for high level skills? What is the role of state and territory governments in this area?*

Courses and programs in areas of national interest that do not enjoy industry or labour market ‘pull’ are currently under-regarded and under-supported in the national planning level (mentioned above at q.1 at 1.3). Without targeted assistance to address higher transaction costs, institutions have to overcome some significant incentive barriers to provide offerings in subjects of small enrolment. An example is the provision of undergraduate training in the many languages that are not seen to be of mainstream importance to the wider employment market and industry, but in which Australia would benefit from maintaining a standing strategic capability. We are thinking here of Middle Eastern and South East Asian languages, for instance, but also many European languages. Reliance upon the market to sort out our national skills needs compromises the capacity of universities to support course provision in the broader strategic national interest. Mechanisms to address this could include a targeted fund of teaching support to which universities choosing to develop courses in low-enrolment areas could apply. Such mechanisms should encourage or mandate the development of a collaborative strategic approach between institutions offering courses in related or overlapping areas, to ensure that efficiency and national skill levels are both maintained.

In the absence of a discrete capability statement addressing advanced, transferable generic skills, we will argue here for mechanisms to ensure that higher order generic processes are supported alongside the more instrumental skills usually understood to be the subject of demands to meet labour force and industry needs.

The evidence to support this focus is found in the repeated calls by industry itself for graduates with the generic higher order skills that are invaluable in problem-oriented industry settings. These include decision-making, critical analysis, clear and orderly thinking, advanced expression, and an ability to sift and deploy evidence. Industry itself frequently calls for universities to focus on these basics as well as the more sophisticated generalist skills, alongside their calls for technically-oriented, profession-specific skills training.

One advantage of developing policy in this area is that these are ever-present needs: they are not subject to the same lag and fashion liabilities as industry-specific technical skills. Another advantage is that these employability skills are best developed in the generalist degrees – in liberal arts and general science – where much of the student interest is still directed.

There are two main things to say on the question of mechanisms to support the development of these high level skills. *Primum non nocere* (first do no harm): mechanisms to ensure that higher education meets national and local needs for high level skills must not be overly directed at specific technical skills development in such a way that they artificially discourage or otherwise disadvantage the development of generic fundamental and higher-order skills. The second point is that a range of initiatives to identify, improve and augment teaching and learning activities that support generic skills acquisition already exist and should be further supported and promoted. The significant student demand for generalist degrees should be celebrated and encouraged, alongside mechanisms to support vocational degree training.

One means of ensuring that both kinds of skills acquisition is supported is the introduction in the Australian higher education sector of a foundation degree model followed by specialist postgraduate training. While we would not like to see this (or any other) model imposed uniformly, we argue strongly that there is a place for this approach in Australia, and indeed that it is likely to become more widespread as the sector becomes more diverse. The Academy regards artificial national uniformity as unhelpful, and supports reforms that create further room for institutions to specialise, diversify, and possibly even amalgamate, in order to pursue their particular missions.

We would further argue that, as some institutions are likely to evolve into specialist, technically-oriented institutions aimed at produced industry-ready accredited professionals, others might usefully offer their students a broader knowledge of social, cultural, and intellectual practices, helping them to develop the equally necessary skills of comparative understanding, critical analysis, and lucid argumentation. It is also likely that some institutions (or some faculties) will see value in combining these strands, either through dual-curriculum approaches or strategic collaboration: it is not hard to see the value to an MBA, for instance, of having technical training in tools for business, while developing high-level generic skills that equip her at a more fundamental and enduring level to be a mobile, articulate, sharp and analytical active learner.

4. *How adequate are the mechanisms for aligning supply and demand of graduates? How do pricing and labour market signals impact on student choices?*

The most obvious problem for alignment of supply and demand is time lag: a need can arrive quickly and it can take five years or more to identify emerging need, design for a reorientation, recruit students, train them and see them off into the workforce.

Additionally, even some of the most radical adherents of free-market ideology¹ are frustrated by the stubborn obstinancy of students to enrol in courses that satisfy their interest rather than serve their supposed interests (narrowly defined in economic

¹ Andrew Norton, 'How saleable are arts skills?' *The Australian*, Wednesday 21 January 2004, p.25.

terms). We are sure that such commentators will express their frustrations in submissions to the Review. We would caution the Expert Panel against taking those protestations too much at face value, not only because the generalist degrees that are inspiring the ire of these observers are actually filling market needs (just not in a vocationally literal way); and because student choice is legitimately directed according to a far greater range of more subtle factors than those recognised in an economic rationalist assessment. Pricing and labour market signals will inevitably play a part in student choice over the entire cohort. Some students will be very sensitive to projected labour market need; others will be very sensitive to upfront fees or debt acquisition. But many more will consider these issues as just two among many important factors to be considered. Placing too much stock on the ability of pricing mechanisms to manipulate student choice is unlikely to succeed.

5. *Are there particular examples of good practice where you can demonstrate either rapid response to skill shortages or successful initiatives to improve generic skills?*

The Medical Humanities Unit at the University of Sydney responded to a rapidly emerging need for postgraduate education in non-technical skills that medical graduates had identified as desirable and even necessary for personal and professional realisation. This very successful unit started its life in the Faculty of Arts and has recently moved to the Faculty of Medicine, and enjoys the respect of other more traditional medical course areas. Additionally, the unit provides coursework to the graduate medical program and conducts original research not only in medical humanities pedagogy but also in the burgeoning scholarly field of the medical humanities.

6. *How effectively are Australian higher education institutions responding to demographic change, especially in providing lifelong learning to meet the challenge of the ageing population and the need for upgrading of skills and re-training?*

The universities are responding fairly well to these trends. A very significant proportion of those returning to higher education later in life are coming to the humanities, often in a bid to ‘round out’ a previously vocational university experience, or else to add colour and a better understanding of the deeper culture in which they are living. For instance, the rapid rise and marked success of medical humanities postgraduate education, such as that mentioned above, meets exactly these needs.

The main problem with returning to university to expand one’s world view or to upgrade skills is that the cost burden is, for the most part, borne entirely by the student. In fact, there is good cause to believe that postgraduate coursework is undertaken at a cost premium to the fee-paying student, that cross-subsidises shortfalls in other areas of provision. Many people at mid-career are in a much better position to pay full fees, with or without the help of real-interest loans, so it has not prevented this section of the student body from increasing significantly in recent years. However, it is quite likely that this factor has had a significant deterrent effect on many potential students. In the context of a recognition that learning is lifelong, and that postgraduate specialisation and reskilling is a normal part of a career, it is

time that the starkly different funding arrangements for undergraduate and postgraduate coursework were standardised to some extent, to better reflect the continuity of these forms of education in a learner-worker's life.

7. *What is the relevance and applicability of the findings and approaches proposed in the United Kingdom paper, Higher Education at Work, for increasing skills levels in the workforce to Australia?*

The Academy supports the *Higher Education at Work* paper's urging of the importance of language and culture education, where it recognises the need 'to encourage more graduates to acquire the language skills and cultural awareness to thrive in a global marketplace.'² Building on our point above at q.3, we recommend strongly that the Expert Panel should consider ways in which languages should be supported within our universities as a discipline-area of particular interest to the health of the sector, industry and society more generally. Additionally, and across all disciplines, we endorse the paper's recognition of the significant value of study abroad and exchange opportunities to students and workers.

The *Higher Education at Work* paper does identify some other useful proposals, but its own limitations do not cohere very effectively with its proclaimed interests. Specifically, the paper states in the executive summary that it adopts 'a particular focus on graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.'³ Yet this focus does not jibe with the industry needs that the paper sets out to address:

Employers particularly value broad 'employability' skills. This is one of the strongest messages from employers to government, and is backed up by recent research suggesting employers tend to look for graduates who exhibit skills and attributes such as communication, motivation, independence, analysis, confidence and problem solving.⁴

Students, we are told, share employer concerns about employability: yet less than half of all students' concerns, abilities, and potential contributions are considered here.

We certainly do not claim for the humanities or the Arts degree a monopoly on the capacity to deliver those and other high-level, transferable skills for living and working, but it is certainly a forte of our disciplines. Despite the professed importance of an educational outcome in which the humanities, arts and social sciences excel, though, the paper excludes those disciplines from its thinking.

Later in the paper, the DIUS notes that most competitor nations share its 'basic analysis';

that in the world of the future there will be increasing demand for well-educated, imaginative and adaptable people to enable businesses and services to innovate and thrive. High level skills help form a sustainable knowledge

² Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (UK), *Higher Education at Work – High Skills: High Value*. London: DIUS, 2008. p.6.

³ Ibid., p.6.

⁴ Ibid., p.14.

economy in which ideas inform and improve practice. **This is an economic imperative.**⁵

Apparently, though, this urgency is felt only with respect to graduates in science, technology, engineering and medicine, despite the fact that Arts degree programs are very well practiced at delivering exactly the transferable high-level skills that are so highly prized.

In contrast to this narrow vision, we welcome the Expert Panel's adoption in the Discussion Paper of a broader purview of disciplinary contribution, along with a recognition that unimaginative instrumental values alone cannot capture many of the beneficial aspects – to individuals and to society – of investment in higher education.

Unsurprisingly, then, the Academy counsels against any reading of the DIUS paper that suspends an awareness of both its self-proclaimed limitation of interest to the science, technology, engineering and medicine disciplines, and its failure to switch from an instrumentalist outlook to incorporate adequately the employer calls for broad transferable skills.

We would oppose the imposition of a false hierarchy of national value that sees the humanities, arts and social sciences ignored in policy formulation, particularly in the face of an acknowledged area of industry need to which those disciplines can make meaningful contributions. We agree that the national interest would be served by targeting some disciplines (right across the board) with strategic support where the market has not addressed demand or national strategic need. Policy initiatives in this arena, however, must be much more intelligent, evidence-based and focussed than the broad 'STEM in/HASS out' brushstroke of *Higher Education at Work*.

Section 3.2 Opportunities to participate in higher education

8. *Should there be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education?*

Yes, there absolutely must be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education.

9. *If you support a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success how do you see it being structured, resourced, monitored and evaluated?*

A national approach should be coordinated at a federal level but implemented at a local institutional level. Strategies should be based rigorously on the evidence of relevant (and if necessary, specially commissioned) research. They should be aimed not only at the Indigenous and low SES cohorts, and geared towards practical matters, but should also be aimed at the non-Indigenous and mid- to high-SES cohorts, and geared towards changing the institutional cultures to welcome, encourage and foster the participation and success of Indigenous and low SES students.

⁵ Ibid., p.9. Bold in the original.

In the case of measures to promote Indigenous participation and success, the specific local strategies and programs should be worked out in consultation with the local Indigenous communities.

Higher education strategies should articulate comprehensively and seamlessly with strategies for Indigenous and low SES participation and success at school and in vocational education and training.

Institutions should be assisted with federal funds to deliver programs aimed at promoting Indigenous and low SES participation and success. Institutions should be provided with the resources to implement meaningful programs and the autonomy to develop locally relevant schemes.

10. What institutional initiatives have proved successful in increasing low SES or Indigenous participation and success? (Please provide information about outcomes as well as activities.)

In the past few years Trinity College (University of Melbourne) has secured endowment through private benefaction for ten or a dozen Indigenous scholarships. This guarantees a strong Indigenous presence in the College, and has enabled Trinity to develop further programs of Indigenous Studies. The total cost is not huge, but the impact on the social and academic life of the College and the University has been considerable.

11. What evidence is available from institutions about the impact on individuals or groups of either failure to gain income support or the inadequacy of income support?

The Academy is not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue. We would point out, however, that Australia needs to act decisively and adequately on student support for living away from home if we are to be able to achieve genuine diversification on the university sector without making damaging and divisive sacrifices to equity of access. This is already a serious problem for rural and regional Australians. But as institutions begin to specialise (which they not only should but certainly will), potential students will find it necessary to move out of the family home and often to another city in order to further their studies. At present, this is prohibitively expensive for many, particularly given recent increases in urban cost of living thanks to soaring rental prices. Real access to courses that match the needs, interests and aptitudes of students will suffer if we do not strengthen our meek student support arrangements. Students may be expected to take a second or lower order choice close to home if the course they want to study is out of reach, but poor fit and a want of enthusiasm can be expected to compromise the efficiency and performance of the sector to some extent, through increased attrition and subdued student outcomes.

Section 3.3 The student experience of higher education

12. How can the quality of the student experience within Australia's higher education institutions be monitored nationally? Is there evidence that declining student: staff ratios have impacted on the quality of the student experience?

The over-dependence on student satisfaction surveys needs to be addressed if the quality of the experience is to be discussed meaningfully. These surveys are not without their uses, but they bear more of the burden of evidence of the quality of experience than the rigour of their methodology can sustain. Student leaders themselves consistently warn sector policy analysts about this pitfall but the satisfaction surveys are still permitted to proxy for quality in discussions. We do not have an answer to how the quality of the student experience could be reliably monitored nationally – indeed, we think it is worth considering the possibility that there actually is no effective way to do this – but it seems necessary to acknowledge the limits of reliability of this over-used instrument.

The Academy is aware of extensive anecdotal evidence – from its own Fellows, other humanists, scholars of other disciplines, the academic union and the student organisations – that supports the claim that the quality of teaching outcomes is being constantly compromised by increases in the student:staff ratio. This is a more nuanced issue than it looks because the impact of the ratio is often felt and reported in terms of access: in a climate of increased casualisation, where some staff are paid for very limited access hours outside face-to-face teaching time, real access can be less than FTE figures imply. Claims about the increased effective access provided by ICT need to be moderated by considerations of staff time to learn to use, maintain and upgrade the technology (leaving less time over for actual consultation); and of moves by academics to rein in the extent to which they are prepared to sacrifice their research and personal time to the trend of the 24/7 lecturer-on-tap.

It is also worth tracking recent trends abroad, especially in light of the development of the Excellence in Research for Australia initiative. In comparable university systems abroad, such as in the USA and the UK, it has become commonplace for research ‘stars’ to become increasingly remote from the scene of teaching, and much less visible in their departments generally. Students attracted by the top researchers have found that they hardly (if ever) see them, let alone draw benefit from working under them. These trends are driven by the funding implications of research prestige, albeit through different mechanisms, so it seems likely that ERA will accelerate an existing trend here for a similar stratification of the departmental scholarly culture. This has implications for many aspects of university life but most especially for the quality of the student experience, at both undergraduate and (particularly) postgraduate levels.

Another aspect of the student experience that the Discussion Paper raises (but that is not addressed in the questions) is so-called voluntary student unionism. It is impossible for visitors to any campus not to appreciate the effect on student life of VSU. Many valuable aspects of the student experience feature life outside the lecture hall and the laboratory, yet many of those experiences are either extinct or severely curtailed thanks to a loss of underlying organisational infrastructure induced by the VSU legislation. If local government is one of the preferred metaphors for student organisations, then the degradation of student life outside the classroom is akin to abandoning the trash collection on the Upper East Side: private splendour amid public squalor. The restoration of some basic funding structure to student organisations that enable them to operate effectively without compromising the rights of students is advisable. It is also possible: we commend the model introduced by the WA Gallup

government in 2002 when it revoked the previous Court government's VSU measures.⁶

13. How can the quality of learning outcomes in Australian higher education be measured more effectively?

Unfortunately, proposals for genuinely national routine monitoring of quality of learning outcomes are likely to be both controversial and expensive. Employer surveys are probably the best measure for assessing fitness for enterprise, but compliance may be difficult to achieve, and they would only capture one aspect of the quality outcome striven for (albeit an important one). National graduate testing would be heavy-handed and stultifying, as it would erase local nuance and diversity and impose a conformist curriculum regime across the country. The expense would, in any case, surely be prohibitive.

The best answer is likely to take the self-accrediting institutions' status seriously and allow them to monitor their own performances. Giving key staff training in best-practice methods of doing this would no doubt be of great assistance. It may also help to extend the mandate of the Australian Universities Quality Agency to allow it to audit not only quality processes but also teaching and learning processes.

Again, though, caution is probably warranted. It is possible that the reliable, comparable, meaningful measure of quality of learning outcomes for which the sector yearns does not actually exist. It seems reasonably possible that 'standards', while real enough to all participants, are too elusive to define, let alone measure. The Discussion Paper notes that

[academic] standards are often implicitly or tacitly understood norms shared by academics working in a particular field, but may not be universally agreed by experts. (p.37)

We agree with this characterisation. We do not agree with the sense that often accompanies it (not in this Discussion Paper, though) that this ineffability of its norms and standards is some peculiarity of academia. It is interesting that, at times, this characterisation is made in a critical way by members of the business world or the political class: two arenas that trade heavily in widely understood, ever-changing and poorly defined norms.

Given this difficulty in achieving universal (or even significant majority) consensus on standards and norms, it is not surprising to note 'moves towards external validation of standards' (p.37); what is surprising is the idea that people can achieve such external validation without defining what it is they hope to externally validate. It seems likely that measures to assess standards from outside (such as benchmarking between institutions and increasing truck between institutions in different jurisdictions) can only defer the problem of agreement on norms. We are certainly not opposed to these measures, and think that the diversity of views that they will introduce is almost always going to be beneficial, but we think it is worth moderating our expectations that 'external validation' is somehow inherently objective, when in

⁶ *Acts Amendment (Student Guilds And Associations) Act (WA) 2002*

fact it is simply a modified version of the application of the hunches about standards that prevail.

14. How do institutions measure the quality of their learning outcomes and how do they know they are nationally and internationally competitive?

The Academy is not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue.

Section 3.4 Connecting with other education and training sectors

15. To what extent should vocational education and training and higher education continue to have distinctive missions and how should these missions be defined?

There are clear and complementary roles played by the different parts of the tertiary system. These distinctions are well understood in business and the wider community. Closer collaboration, improved pathways between sectors and better integration within dual sector institutions are all very positive developments. More work, as ever, remains to be done. But it is difficult to see how the country would benefit from disguising de facto differential missions, practices, traditions and objectives behind a façade of uniformity. Good fences make good neighbours: effective collaboration and improved student outcomes will benefit from strong independent self-confident institutions working together. Any attempt to collapse the missions of tertiary sectors will result in obfuscation and confusion.

It may pay, instead, to try to identify and address the issues at the root of calls to unify the tertiary sectors. Funding formulae and questions of esteem are the motivations most commonly mentioned. There is no doubt that the role of the vocational education and training sector must be properly supported if it is to deliver on its mission: state and federal arrangements could be improved to bring this about. At the same time, the role of VET (and non-university higher education providers, for that matter) needs to be respected and valued. TAFEs should be able to provide higher education courses in just the same way as any other competent body that passes the accreditation requirements: to limit their activities in this area would be arbitrary and punitive. However, the offerings of non-self-accrediting institutions (whether private higher education institutions or TAFEs providing higher education courses) should be distinctive from those of universities, in the interests of market transparency for the benefit of students, employers and other educational institutions.

16. Does the movement between the sectors of students with credit need to be improved? If so, in what ways?

It is probably not desirable to try to artificially create demand for movement between the sectors. The AQF commissioned work on Recognition of Prior Learning⁷ that examined extant practice and elucidated a rational, broadly accepted basis for advanced credit for achievement. It is certainly true that the ensuing Principles⁸ could

⁷ L. Wheelahan et al., *Recognition of Prior Learning: Policy and Practice in Australia*. Lismore: Southern Cross University, 2002.

⁸ Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, *National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning*. Carlton: AQFAB, 2004. Found at <http://www.aqf.edu.au/rplnatprin.htm>

be better known in both sectors, to ensure that students are alert to the possibilities. But it is likely that some students are not actually seeking credit, as they are not wishing to minimise the units they can take: therefore, it is quite probable that more students than the credit statistics identify are happily studying away with undeclared qualifications from the other sector.

Another tack that is more likely to serve genuine needs would be to promote collaboration between vocational education and training and higher education in fields that lend themselves to such a strategy. Teaching collaboration – potentially involving classroom mixing – and even research collaboration (on the model of industry linkage collaboration, for example) could be of significant benefit to participants in both sectors.

17. To what extent should relative provision between the sectors be planned or demand driven. What are the effects of current differences on funding, governance and regulation in limiting planning or influencing choice between the sectors?

Again, it is not at all apparent that there is any need to manipulate relativities of provision between these sectors. With the proviso of improvements to the issues mentioned above (respect; funding; collaboration), it does not seem productive to force the issue. To the extent possible, extraneous issues should be minimised or eradicated as impediments or artificial incentives so that student choice between sectors is driven by the same suite of factors driving choice within sectors: quality; job prospects; affinity and aptitude; student experience; prestige; affordability; convenience; etc.

18. Can institutions provide examples of good practices which have led to movement between the sectors with high levels of credit and good learning outcomes?

The Academy is not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue.

Section 3.5 Higher education's role in the national innovation system

19. By what mechanisms should research activities in Australian universities be supported?

This is a very large question. The Academy has participated fulsomely in the various federal consultations held this year concerning different aspects of research and related matters, namely:

1. The consultation drafts of the 2008 Higher Education Endowment Fund Guidelines and Funding Agreement (4 April)
2. The Cutler Review of the National Innovation System (30 April)
3. The review of the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy Roadmap (14 May)
4. The inquiry of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation into Research Training and Research Workforce issues in Australian Universities (13 June)
5. The consultation paper ARC's Future Fellowships (30 June)
6. The consultation paper on the Excellence in Research for Australia initiative (30 June)

7. The exposure draft of the 2008 Strategic Roadmap for Australian Research Infrastructure (18 July)

Additionally, and in parallel to preparing this submission, we are finalising our response to the Australian National Data Service Draft Interim Business Plan. Finally, Dr Cutler is due to deliver his Green Paper to Government on the day submissions are due for the present Review, and it will be released to the sector for comment by mid-August.

This output constitutes a large volume of commentary on research and attendant issues in just over four months. As the Expert Panel will appreciate, it is not possible to distil the contents of these various responses for presentation here in any workable way. We would therefore direct the Expert Panel for detail to the relevant page on the Academy website, at <<http://www.humanities.org.au/Policy/Overview.htm>>.

We are, however, pleased to outline a few principles and objectives that underpin our view on all of the mechanisms for supporting Australian research. These are:

1. Research in areas of specific national interest should be supported through targeted programs, not buoyed by discipline-wide generalisations;
2. Research and researchers should be supported without discrimination on the basis of discipline;
3. Expertise should be solicited and valued solely on the basis of its ability to contribute to problem-solving and the pursuit of opportunities, regardless of discipline or industry;
4. Selection panels, advisory bodies, and similar committees should have the benefit of pan-disciplinary expertise;
5. Funding mechanisms should abandon crude and arbitrary relative funding multipliers based on large-scale discipline groupings;
6. Research activity should be funded on the basis of actual and full cost;
7. Funding formulae should be designed to avoid unintended consequences on non-relevant grounds such as disciplinary, institutional regional and gender considerations;
8. National planning should adjust for market failure in areas of national need;
9. Properly planned, system-wide funding mechanisms should ensure that the nation maintains an appropriate spread of research activities across the range of disciplines, and discourage summative convergence by institutions across the system; and
10. The National Research Priorities should be rewritten to more accurately capture the contributions of the humanities, arts and social sciences to the existing four NRPs, and should be augmented by a fifth NRP on Social and Cultural Knowledge.

20. *On what principles and for what purposes should research activity be concentrated in particular universities or types of universities?*

Research should be funded wherever it is of high quality, has a strong research culture to sustain it, and has adequate infrastructure to support it. The Academy is aware of strident arguments calling for the direction of research money towards those institutions that are currently research-intensive, as well as equally strident arguments

for diverting money away from those same institutions. We are unimpressed with many of these arguments. We hold that, subject to the caveats above, research funding should make its way over institutional walls without regard to their constitution: sandstone, red brick or concrete.

That said, it is a reality that research funding is not only finite but actually quite restricted, and it is very important to distribute it effectively. We do not believe it is in the national interest to spread research funding thinly and evenly across the entire sector, as it is too much to expect a large number of institutions in a relatively small country all to conduct internationally recognised work in a suitable range of disciplines. Nor do we think it is wise to overly aggregate research funding in a narrow range of areas and institutions, and allow important and excellent research to wither.

In the Academy's view, the research funding strategy should seek to strike a practical balance between these unproductive extremes. It should aim to support excellent work being done in sites of research concentrations of critical mass. It should support outstanding work across the disciplinary range, wherever research strength and activity are of sustainable volume.

The regime should include scope for establishing new concentrations of research activity where this is of strategic benefit, but it should focus primarily on the support and development of established strengths that can demonstrate sustainability and durability. It should also make provision to ensure that the research enterprise nationally supports work across the full range of disciplines, and to support research in areas of particular national interest. An effective national research regime will also foster collaboration, between institutions and disciplines locally as well as internationally.

21. Do you believe there is a place in Australia's higher education system for universities that are predominantly 'teaching only' universities? If so, why?

The Academy has no problem with the existence of teaching-only higher education institutions: indeed, we recognise that they currently play a useful role that is likely to become more important in the future. We do not see a problem with public institutions moving into this arena. While we do hold to the value of the teaching-research nexus, we do not believe that it is essential to the provision of every conceivable activity in higher education teaching and learning.

The Academy is of the firm view, however, that such institutions should not be called universities. There are plenty of other terms available – college, academy, institute, etc. – but the term university is well established in Australia to denote a particular kind of higher education institution. Besides conducting the teaching and learning functions common to other higher education providers, they are: research-active; engaged in higher degree research education; and self-accrediting. It follows that that the Academy is opposed to teaching-only institutions being given self-accrediting status or the right to bestow research higher degrees, particularly doctorates. It is our strong conviction that the proper exercise of these privileges is deeply informed by the research function, and should therefore be reserved to universities or closely related entities, on the definition we adhere to above.

The Academy supports the notion of specialised universities, but we would argue that within the fields of specialisation the same rigorous standards must apply to earn the rights of self-accreditation, doctoral conferral, and naming as a university.

Section 3.6 Australia's higher education sector in the international arena

22. Are there any unintended consequences of the current approach to internationalisation of higher education in Australia?

The Academy is not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue. However, it is interesting to note that, despite the understandable focus on quality of provision to the international market (both onshore and offshore), one consequence that is never discussed is the exposure of the domestic Australian higher education system as a whole to international scrutiny. The global gaze upon our entire sector – not only those parts we are extending out into the world – is invited by our international marketing activities. If we are to offer our wares in the international market, we must be prepared to have our domestic offerings examined and judged.

23. What is an appropriate role for government in assisting the Australian higher education system to internationalise? On what principles should this role rest and what purposes should it serve?

The maintenance of the strictest standards of quality should be the paramount concern of all parties, as the future prospects for every institution in the international higher education business depends upon the perception of the Australian sector as a whole – which can be compromised by just one player.

The take-up by Australian domestic students of study abroad opportunities is very low, most likely to the cost impediments. Assistance from government (perhaps in a recoverable form through a HELP program) would likely have a significant effect, and would be a sound investment in the longer run.

In any program to promote international linkages (both inbound and outbound), it is imperative that equity of access is provided, regardless of discipline.

24. Can you provide any examples of good practice in encouraging local students to undertake study in other countries?

We are not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue. However we would point to the Academy's own Humanities Travelling Fellowships program as a leading example of support for early career researchers (not students, admittedly) to gain access to primary research resources and to meet with international colleagues and mentors. This is a very modest program indeed, supported by our federal Grant-in-Aid and a number of strategic partnerships and bequests, and the value of awards is not lavish. As an Academy activity, however, it comes with considerable prestige, and recipients report significant leverage value within their institutions and in other granting bodies of the award. This is appropriate, as awards are fiercely contested among many high quality Australian candidates, and they are judged by very senior humanities scholars from within the Academy. We would be delighted to be able to extend this program to promising humanities students, and perhaps to enable

Australian humanists to spend time as visiting scholars in a foreign department (for exposure to teaching practices as much as to research activity), but funding constraints prohibit these moves.

Section 3.7 Higher education's contribution to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital

25. *How would you define knowledge transfer and community engagement in an Australian context?*

'Knowledge transfer' seems to us an awkward and unsatisfactory term for a concept that has much promise and potential within Australia. Knowledge Transfer has been defined as 'the practical problem of getting a packet of knowledge from one part of the organization to another'. This is an obviously good thing to do within a large commercial operation, though it may seem a less attractive prospect in universities, where knowledge is more generally regarded as something to be argued over, interpreted, quizzed, refashioned, not simply delivered in a sealed box, like pizza, to another part of the organization, or to a grateful and passively attendant public. 'Knowledge' is a substance likely to change its shape and colour (however subtly) even as you argue over it. Even in a first-year tutorial, knowledge is not simply *transferred*. To perpetuate this phrase when speaking of a university's engagement with the public is to assume that university teachers learn nothing from their experiences with community groups, and that knowledge is not in itself advanced by these interactions. This, in our opinion, is a mistaken view. Universities themselves, like the questions they seek to address, can be refreshed and re-energized by such encounters. Recent experiences in both large and small urban centres show there is a considerable public appetite for shared learning experiences of this kind – public lectures in town halls, libraries, art galleries, museums; festivals of ideas, festivals of the arts, writers' festivals; universities of the third age – an appetite likely to increase as the population ages.

We conceive of this multi-faceted function of 'community engagement' quite broadly. It is the component of university activity that engages directly with the world outside the walls, without expecting it to enrol or form a research partnership. This engagement can take many forms, drawing on its other two functions of teaching and research. It includes some of the activities that some classify as 'knowledge transfer' (e.g. continuing education course). Particularly in outer suburban and regional universities, it can incorporate activities aimed at supporting the local community. It can include various forms of the provision of expertise: commentary to the media; evidence in court; service on advisory boards and committees; and addressing parliamentary hearings. It can include expert critique (of the kind we address at q.1 at 1.1) outside the strict peer-reviewed scholarly communication model, reaching to a wider, public audience. It can involve activities ranging as widely as product development and pro bono community service.

26. *Do you believe that knowledge transfer and community engagement are legitimate and appropriate roles for contemporary higher education institutions? If so, how do you see this additional role for the higher education sector blending with its traditional roles and are there limits to these additional roles?*

Yes, these activities are not only legitimate and appropriate roles for contemporary higher education institutions: they are obligations (at least for the publicly funded institutions and the universities). We conceive of this function deriving from and overlapping the other two roles.

27. If you think that knowledge transfer and community engagement are appropriate roles for higher education institutions, how do you believe these functions should be funded?

They should be funded through a combination of a stream within the package of federal government block funding, contested federal government grants for specific projects, philanthropic support, and partnerships with other levels of government and corporations.

Section 3.8 Resourcing the system

28. What incentives or unintended consequences are there in the current arrangements for higher education funding?

Many programs either explicitly exclude the humanities, arts and social sciences or are specifically limited to the sciences, technology, engineering and medicine (e.g. R&D tax concession, international research grants). Other programs and arrangements impose a very steep gradient in favour of STEM and away from HASS (RTS, IGS, and therefore RIBG). Consequentially, program design in other areas inadvertently disfavours the humanities because extraneous factors that are invisible within the programs provide material incentives for selecting for STEM disciplines (HEEF).

On the student side, perverse disincentives flow from gross assumptions that may even amount to attempts at social engineering. For instance, it must be very hard for a bright, socially committed school-leaver to contemplate studying law in order to work in a community legal centre, as the funding model is predicated exclusively upon the high-yield big firm graduate employment model. Law is one of the cheapest subjects to teach (funded at a total of \$10,173 in 2008, it is only just ahead of the humanities at \$9,742)⁹, yet law students incur a band 3 HECS contribution obligation, along with much more expensive courses like medicine and dentistry. This is justified by a blend of market forces argument and an affordability proposition that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (even if you are idealistic going in and keep the faith, you have to go to a big firm on graduation just to get the HECS monkey off your back). Law students pay a massive 84% of the full cost of provision, by far the highest proportion. By contrast, medical students pay the same HECS, covering only 32% of the cost: science students in 2009 will pay only 22% of the cost, less than nursing and education.

(Those humanities students, incidentally, costing around the same to teach as the law students, pay 52% of the full cost of provision. Social science students cost a fair bit more than their humanist colleagues, but pay the same HECS, wearing only 34% of the cost of their education.)

⁹ All figures derived from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations student contribution data, found at <http://www.goingtouni.gov.au/Main/FeesLoansAndScholarships/Undergraduate/CommonwealthSupportForYourPlaceAndHECS-HELP/WhatYouPay.htm>

29. *To what extent are the current funding models adequate to secure the future of Australia's higher education sector? If there are better models, what are they?*

We would like to reiterate our call for the eradication of bias on the basis of discipline in current funding arrangements. These are starkest in the research and research education domain, and we have covered this terrain exhaustively in our submission to the other reviews and inquiries.

We also consider that discipline differentials need a serious rethink in the undergraduate coursework area. We accept that an attempt to massage HECS prices into market-responsive incentives has been made in some instances (the national priority discounted HECS rate for nursing and education – and, from 2009, science – is the best example). We don't disagree with the strategy, especially as we do not find convincing the research alleging to disprove HECS deterrence. (And it does seem that HECS discounting would have to be an absurdity if HECS does indeed not have any deterrent effect.) But the strategy conflicts with some other signals, as discussed earlier, and this confusing field of crossed wires should be rethought from the beginning, redesigned on clear a priori objectives and with recourse to more reliable, methodologically sound research.

Additionally, we think that serious thought must be given to reducing the now unsustainable stark funding differential between undergraduate and postgraduate coursework provision. As the latter becomes increasingly normalised for professional accreditation, lifelong learning, reskilling and upskilling, its difference in kind from undergraduate education diminishes radically. Postgraduate coursework is no longer the luxury add-on to the core essential of a bachelor degree. But with the fee structures as they are, many courses are prohibitively expensive for many potential (and capable) students. Sooner or later, this problem will need to be addressed, to avoid creating a qualification ceiling for the cash-poor and debt-averse.

More generally, the Academy supports the sector-wide calls for: real funding of the full cost of research; significantly improved student support programs, starting with a significant boost to the value of the APA; and block grant indexation.

30. *Are the current institutional arrangements for determining relative funding between higher education institutions appropriate? If not, what changes should be considered?*

The Academy is not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue.

Section 3.9 Governance and regulation

31. *Is it time to reshape tertiary education in Australia and streamline financing and regulatory arrangements? If so, what structural changes would you make and why?*

The Academy is not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue.

32. *Is the level of regulation in the sector appropriate? If not, why not, and what should be done to reduce the level of regulation?*

The Academy is not as well placed as institutions to report in detail on this issue.

33. Does Australia's Quality Assurance Framework need revision? If so, why? What changes would you make?

Probably not. The revised National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes, approved by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in October 2007, seem to us to be suitably rigorous. These revisions tightened up looseness on the issuing of degrees and the use of the title of university (and related titles) that had concerned the Academy.

34. Are changes required to the Australian Qualifications Framework?

Not in any wholesale way. The sectoral basis for the descriptors mentioned in the Discussion Paper (p.42) is necessary for home-sector buy-in to the AQF model, and for accurate apprehension of the meaning of the descriptor matrix. It is probably not possible to devise common descriptors without alienating not only the 'other' sector but also the home sector.

35. Is there more that could be done to improve university governance? How should this be done?

The overdetermination of the supposed similarity between universities and businesses could be eased a little at the level of governing senates and councils, to the benefit of their institutions. While business acumen is welcome, overweighing councils with boardroom denizens at the expense of experience in the core business of universities is not a brilliant idea. The much-maligned ex officio or elected staff and student positions are not such a bad thing either, as they provide a practical and accountable point of access to key internal constituencies.