



Australasian Association for Institutional Research

Newsletter, Rankings Rigour

February
2014

President's Update

by Dave Marr

HAPPY NEW YEAR to all! 2014 is shaping up to be another great year for AAIR.

Those who attended the 2013 AAIR Annual Forum in Perth would know that from 2014 AAIR will be offering two fellowships initially to the value of \$1,000 each. The 'Raj Sharma Fellowship', in recognition of Raj's influence on Institutional Research (IR) in Australasia, is focussed on academic or career advancement in the pursuit of IR knowledge. The 'Zimmer Travel Fellowship' is offered to members to assist in covering some of the associated travel costs in attending an event held by an AAIR affiliate.

Applications will be invited in March and awarded by June. The recipients will have 12 months to utilise the Fellowship. For further information visit the 'Fellowship' webpage on the AAIR website (<http://www.aair.org.au/pages/fellowships>). A Special Bulletin seeking applications for these fellowships will be sent out in March, so if you're interested keep an eye out for that.

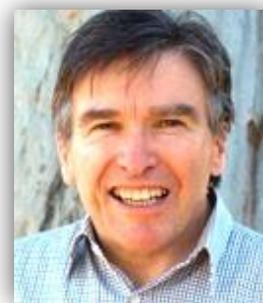
This year also sees the merger of the AAIR Annual Forum and the Australian Higher Education Evaluation Forum (AHEEF). I flagged that this would be occurring in my [President's Report](#) to the Perth Forum. Sara Booth, Bruce Guthrie, Kathie Rabel and I met via teleconference on 14 January to discuss

the logistics associated with this new arrangement. It is envisaged that Sara and one other person from the AHEEF group would join the organising committee for the 2014 Forum. This is an exciting development and I am looking forward to Sara and her colleague's involvement with AAIR. I envisage that the synergies between the two groups will allow the AAIR Surveys and Evaluation Special Interest Group to broaden its scope which will be mutually beneficial to both groups. I can't see this being anything other than a long and prosperous association.

There have also been some changes to the AAIR Executive Committee. As you might know, from mid-2013, David de Bellis has taken over the role of Treasurer from Jeff Holmes. Bruce Guthrie has kindly stepped in to the Secretary's role for the next 12 months, giving Dean Ward a well-earned break. Dean has been the AAIR Secretary for the past 8 years. The Secretary is one of those roles which go unnoticed for much of the time. However those on the Executive know how much time and effort Dean has put into his role. His experience on the Committee has been so helpful to me and other more newly appointed committee members. In many ways AAIR has been kept on the straight and narrow by the combined efforts of Jeff Holmes and Dean Ward over

the past few years. I'd therefore like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to Dean for his diligence, his forethought and perseverance over such a long period of service to AAIR. His contribution cannot be underestimated and the organisation is in a much better position thanks to Dean's efforts. In his place, I'm certain Bruce will maintain the high standards set by Dean especially while Dean remains on the Committee in an advisory role.

Preparations for the SIG Forum and Annual Forum are well underway. Further information will be forthcoming over the next few weeks and months.



AAIR Forum – Insights from Institutional Research: Exploring New Shores

by Victoria Chapman, Conference and Association Manager from Leishman Associates

Thank you to all 105 delegates who attended the annual AAIR Forum – *Insights from Institutional Research: Exploring New Shores* which was held at the Rendezvous Grand Hotel Perth Scarborough from the 13-15 November 2013. Forum Chair, Robert McCormack of The University of Western Australia opened the event, which was followed by a fantastic Welcome to Country from Professor Len Collard also of UWA. After a day of informative sessions guests attended casual welcome drinks at the forum venue, overlooking Scarborough beach.

Throughout the event delegates heard from Emeritus Professor Alan Robson, University of Western Australia; Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable; Phil Aungles, Department of Education; and Julie Hare, The Australian. Forum sessions were of a high standard, with streams covering student experience to emerging technologies. Congratulations to Hannes Looock of the University of Johannesburg for being awarded best session and to Michael Luckman, La Trobe University, for being voted as the best new presenter.

The University of Western Australia hosted the Forum Dinner in their University Club – it was a great night of award winning fine food and excellent company. During the evening



Ewa Seidel, Flinders University, was awarded the Best Paper Award – congratulations Ewa! The usual suspects started the dance floor off and sung their way onto the buses at the end of the evening.

Prior to the dinner most delegates opted to take a tour of The University of Western Australia and they experienced a spectacular sunset from the top of Winthrop Tower. Thank you to Terry Larder for facilitating the tours.

Of course, the Forum could not have been the success it was without support from the Local Organising Committee (LOC). We would like to thank The University of Western Australia for forming much of the LOC, representatives included Robert McCormack (Forum Chair), Luke Minchin, Sandra Ng Wing Lit, Ploy Tangtulyangkul and Wayne Griffiths. Thank you to the AAIR executive members Dean Ward, Bruce

Guthrie and Don Johnston who also sat on the LOC and provided valuable input.

The AAIR Forum sponsors and exhibitors are an integral part of the AAIR Forum. The Forum is very fortunate to have ongoing support from several sponsors and are very grateful to eXplorance (platinum sponsor), Graduate Careers Australia (name badge sponsor) and Altis (exhibitor) for their support of the 2013 event.

Thank you again to all those who attended AAIR 2013 – we look forward to seeing you in Melbourne in 2014!

AAIR FORUM 2014

Look out for details in coming months on the AAIR 2014 Forum. We look forward to seeing you in Melbourne in November!



Anh Nguyen, Team Leader of the Strategic Information Services unit at Griffith University, got the opportunity to attend the

AAIR 2013 Forum and had the following to say...

The AAIR Forum was really good from a number of perspectives:

- *Insights in to the Higher Education sector from the former VC of UWA, Julie Hare (Editor of Higher Education in The Australian), and the former Education Minister for Western Australia. These insights lay in looking backward, but more importantly in looking forward to the challenges and opportunities in the sector.*

- *Networking is always great at the Forum, it helps to broaden my perspective, and prompts me to improve/streamline our processes.*
- *Gaining more knowledge in areas outside of my direct work, like Surveys.*
- *The opportunity to speak directly with leaders in Higher Education from journalists, policy makers, to those of us on the ground (from VCs to Analysts) to compare and contrast what we are, and could be, doing.*
- *One of the best things is getting the time to consider all aspects of what we do, and reflect on what I want to do in the future.*

Higher Education@home

by Emma Liversidge

1. Through an [ARC Special Research Initiative](#), the University of Queensland opened the [Science of Learning Research Centre](#) in late November. The Centre hosts researchers in education, neuroscience and cognitive psychology who will “assess the impact of different types of learning and innovative strategies to inform teaching practices”.
2. NCVER Portal – launch due in February. For those who want to connect with NCVER information, products and services.
3. The online revolution has spun on toward VET with OUA offering a suite of vocational qualifications through the new subsidiary “[Open Training Institute](#)” (OTI). OTI is packaging its qualifications using a [weekly cost basis](#), which is likely to make the investment appear financially manageable to its audience.
4. Professor Craven, VC at ACU, has waded in to the quality debate in [The Australian](#), quoted saying trade practices rigour would assist regulate the publishing of inflated ATAR scores. In a nice balance on perspective, Professor Smith, acting VC at Fed Uni was quoted as saying their focus was on what students exit with, rather than entry.
5. [High Wired](#) reported ANUs new flexible double degrees have been a draw card with at least one third of school leaver applicants preferencing these offerings.
6. Do you believe the [demand driven system](#) is hitting the bottom of the pool? Some States are certainly showing some indications of this.
7. Are you a professional staff member in Higher Education? You may wish to participate in a [survey](#) currently being conducted by Campus Review, which is collecting feedback on the biggest issues facing the professional management workforce.
8. Risk management is increasingly important to institutions as the operating environment continues to change and challenge what we are, have done, and look to do in the future. ATEM recently loaded an [article from last years risk management symposium](#) written by Phillip Cenere that may get your risk management thinking cap on.
9. A great friend of mine recently shared an article on [Australian equality](#) and considering its relevance with education I thought I'd share it with you.
10. Commencements in apprenticeships show a decline in December, following growth in September 2013, according to a press release by [NCVER](#).
11. Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, has announced a Teaching Education Ministerial Advisory Group to put “[Students First](#)” through four areas of teacher quality, principal autonomy, parental engagement and strengthening curriculum. [The Australian](#) quoted panel chair, Greg Craven, as likening the improvements teacher education required as “needing a coat of paint”, and describing the focus of the Group on the real issues: “how can we improve it, which is about melding theory and practice, and subject content with the practice of teaching it”. [The Scan](#) also joined the burgeoning free-for-all, noting Australian Education Union’s federal president calling for “tougher entry requirements, more rigorous assessment for training teachers, more classroom experience prior to graduation, and an ongoing focus on professional learning and development throughout their careers”.
12. TEQSA’s bumpy road continues with [The Australian](#) recently releasing an article on pending redundancies.
13. [The Australian](#) reported on the first wave of grants being awarded for study abroad and professional internships as part of the New Columbo plan. The New Columbo plan will release further grants that support “elite scholarships and broader mobility grants” shortly.
14. [ACARA](#) (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Agency) has just released a number of learning areas in the Australian Curriculum.
15. Interested in the Queensland Review of Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance Processes? A ‘[preliminary thinking and options](#)’ paper has been released to stakeholders.
16. Want to know more about International student enrolments in Australia? Check out the [Australian Education International website](#) which shows enrolment numbers in 2013 were just below those of 2008.
17. Early 2014 also welcomed Australia’s newest tertiary education and training institution, [Melbourne Polytechnic](#). And only weeks after its launch, NMITs CEO Andrew Giddy announced his [sudden resignation](#).
18. While Hockey has been on the record announcing [no further cuts will be made to education](#), we all remain skittish about the announcements in May. Peak body Universities Australia, took the opportunity to point out to the government that [Universities could provide the crucial driver of “economic transformation”](#) in areas hit by the end of the car manufacturing industry in Australia.
19. Competition for the international student market continues to thrive, and with this innovative solutions can hopefully be tested. [The Australian](#) recently reported a number of ideas Barry Cooper, of Deakin University, has suggested to entice international students to study here.
20. Lately it seems as if crowd-funding is penetrating every market, and with an article in [University World News](#), showcasing the Australian Higher Education landscape. With shrinking funding, and the challenges that come with corporate partnerships researchers are turning to crowd-funding platform [Experiment](#).
21. HERDSA has just released [HERDSA Queensland branch](#) website.
22. If the Federal Budget is on your mind you can take a look at the [UA 2014-15 Pre-Budget Submission](#).
23. Consultation is occurring on the Draft Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2015 Submission Documents. [Universities Australia](#) publish their feedback on their website, but you can



participate via the [Australian Research Council website](#).

24. The Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) released its [10th Communiqué](#) to stakeholders in December. In this Communiqué it advised stakeholders to expect consultation to continue to occur in 2014.
25. In a late February [Address to the National Press Club](#), Chair of Universities Australia, Sandra Harding presented a tidy call to arms for the tertiary sector. My favourite part of the speech:

"... there are Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs and the rise of online learning technology; and there are debates about virtual infrastructure versus bricks and mortar; 'quality versus quantity' and the demand driven system; about homogenous versus distinctive institutions; the fee structures and what students have to pay, what they should pay and the willingness and ability of government to adequately fund education and research. Universities, even in our modern form, are in a process of reinvention even as the policy and regulatory (or should I say de-regulatory) environment is being re-crafted. We are no more 'done' than the Australian economy. Just like governments, business and industry, we have to operate on ourselves with vigour and with the longer term in mind."
26. Interested in participating in a survey on institutional policy? Gain additional information about the survey from Brigid Freeman (brigid.freeman@unimelb.edu.au) or to access the survey:
 - a. [Australia](#)
 - b. [New Zealand](#)
 - c. [Papua New Guinea](#)

Rankings and rigour?

by Emma Liversidge

I was tempted to have this article titled Rankings Rigor Mortis, but I knew that'd be unprofessional so I refrained... If you work in a University you are bound to have caught a whiff of the rankings. International rankings are important business to a University for the reputational value they offer in attracting research collaborations, prospective staff, and prospective international students.

Currently, the main international rankings are:

- [Academic Ranking of World Universities \(ARWU\)](#)
- [Leiden University Ranking](#)
- [QS World University Rankings](#)
- [Times Higher Education World University Rankings](#)

For years I've been meaning to delve deeper in to the world of rankings, and began collecting articles in a bid to understand it all better. One article, a review on a book about rankings, grabbed my attention, "[It will all end in tiers](#)", a review written by Guy Redden in Australian Universities Review on the book "[Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education](#)" by Ellen Hazelkorn and published in 2011.

In a thorough publication typical of the Group of Eight (Go8), a paper titled "[World University Rankings: ambiguous signals](#)" was released in October 2012.

Some of the key criticisms on international rankings have included:

- the heavy weighting toward research indicators over learning and teaching,
- at least one of the major rankings is for-profit and therefore more likely to have a specific agenda,
- changing of definitions or calculations can make comparison across years impossible,
- "Minor statistical differences of questionable significance can appear both great and authoritative" (quote thanks to Guy Redden).

Most recently [The Australian](#) reported on the six Australian Universities who have dominated in the recent QS World University Ranking. In the article, University of Melbourne VC, Glyn Davis, raised another criticism of rankings that use reputational surveys as a key indicator. Simply put, if your University is well recognised across the globe you're likely to score

extremely well.

While the recent focus on rankings is largely agreed to have started in 2003 with the launch of the ARWU, there is acknowledgement of the desire to rank institutions from much more distant times. I'm yet to come across any person or commentary to say rankings are going anywhere, and of course, the by-product of a sharpening focus on these rankings is the tendency for institutions to swing the figures to ensure better outcomes on the ladder.

Rankings are so important, and newsworthy, that media outlets like The Australian include a section in their Higher Education publication just on [Rankings](#).

Beer-o'clock

If you're looking for that Beer-tastic feeling you may want to check out the [Beerviz](#) visualization tool. Simply select which kind of Beer you savour and check out the visualization of similar beers.

POSITIONS VACANT



Seeking another opportunity in Institutional Research? Try our [Opportunities](#) webpage for current vacancies in the profession

Looking for some training and development?

See our [Training and Development](#) webpage focused on training for institutional researchers.

Not sure how to make that hard sell?

In times of shrinking funds we all have to compete to gain access to funds. If you've got great ideas but don't know how to persuade management to give you an opportunity to showcase them you may want to check out the [Harvard Business Review Guide to Building Your Business Case](#).

Who's the best of the best in big data?

[Fast Company](#) has published an article on what it considers "the world's top 10 most innovative companies in big data". And the winner is... General Electric, where it launched "software to help airlines and railroads move their data to the cloud and partnered with Accenture to form Taleris, a startup that will help airlines predict mechanical malfunctions and reduce flight cancellations". But Fast Company didn't stop there, it's released a list of the [World's most innovative companies](#), not surprisingly Google takes numero uno!

15. Erasmus+ launched on the first day of 2014, a new EU programme that [covers education from school to adult education and youth non-formal learning](#). Almost half of the US \$20 billion plus budget will be devoted to Higher Education. [Erasmus+](#) doesn't just herald bigger dollars (a 40% increase compared to current spending is nothing to sneeze at), it is set to introduce a learner structure to enhance impact and visibility.
16. A three-year research project, [QUEST for Quality for Students](#), run by the European Students' Union has published a number of findings regarding student involvement in the quality of higher education. The project has published all of its findings on its [website](#).
17. From my neck of the woods it certainly appears as if the hypo-activity over MOOCs is reducing to more tolerable levels, however discourse no doubt continues. [The Economist](#) reports the financial demands of online learning, where online learning can create enticing margins the more students it takes, the fixed costs (curriculum development, material design, interactive learning systems, etc.) are relatively high. In this article it is speculated that the select few of our expert teacher's will be "compensated like superstars in the entertainment industry". The article touches on some interesting points regarding how MOOCs influence different institutions in different ways. Notable is the elite institutions, who *"operate like venture-capital firms, offering subsidized, labour-intensive education to highly qualified students. They aim to cultivate a sense of belonging and gratitude in students in order to recoup their investment decades later in the form of donations from successful alumni"*.
18. [Forum Academy](#) a non-profit initiative of the World Economic Forum is another new player aiming to "deliver world-class curriculum" online. Similar to Coursera, edX or the Khan Academy, the [platform will be "directed toward professionals and lifelong learners"](#).
19. Hanover Research has just published [Online Postsecondary Education Trends](#), analysis of around 700 institutions on the current state of for-credit online education.
20. The Chronicle of Higher Education just released a [College Leader Insight report](#) on perceived value for a 4 year Bachelor's degree. The report shows a difference between what college leader's and employers perceive the value of a degree. One has to wonder if the fast paced change in expectations of what the degree

should deliver has impacted this difference. Meanwhile, [Universities Australia](#) released a University/Business partnership agreement reached to "identify, promote and disseminate further opportunities for Work Integrated Learning (WIL)". Perhaps direct connections with industry will ensure our graduates are work ready upon graduation.

21. Want to know more about integrated and packaged analytics? Try this Strata article on [big data solutions](#).

Thank you!

Thank you to all of our members and readers who responded to the Newsletter Survey. The AAIR Executive Committee is considering the feedback from the Newsletter Survey sent on 1 October 2013. A copy of the results can be seen at <http://aair.org.au/news>. The Committee will use the feedback in shaping the newsletter for the future.

I'd originally planned to do a tidy wrap up of 2013, but after seeing so many tidy wrap-ups I thought, "why duplicate the effort?". [The Scan](#) provided a nice little recap on 2013, and yesterday [Sandra Harding](#), in her Address to the Press Club had some great thoughts to share.

Emma
AAIR eNewsletter Editor

