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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Kia ora tātou katoa – Hello everyone

April for me is a month of reflection. It marks the middle of autumn in New Zealand, with the heat of summer fading and cooler temperatures taking its place. The leaves change colour, and the end of daylight-saving time signals short days and long nights. Those infrequent warm days provide a tease of the warm summer past, and the south-westerly winds a warning of the impending cold and darkness of winter.

April also prompts reflection on traditions and personal values. For those who follow the Christian faith, Easter is a pivotal time in the church calendar. For many of us, it brings spicy Easter buns, chocolate eggs, and bunnies, alongside the erratic opening hours of shops and the annoying public holiday surcharge at cafes and restaurants. The pre-Good Friday supermarket rush, when people scramble as if the shops were closing for more than a day, is a spectacle of modern life.

In Aotearoa | New Zealand, Easter is a bustling period with numerous events nationwide. Inland from me, in the stunning wine-growing region of Central Otago, annual food and wine festivals draw large crowds, and the magnificent Warbirds over the Wanaka airshow attracted up to 70,000 people to a town of just 11,000. I took a break from my studies to attend a much smaller event, the Strath Taieri A & P (agricultural and pastoral) show, the last of the season in Middlemarch, an hour inland from Dunedin. On a sunny day, families enjoyed the community hall exhibits of baking and vegetable displays, preserves and jams, and merino fleeces, then they watched show jumping, horse and pony displays, sheep races, and the pet parade outside. The Mr Whippy van, sausage sizzle, and beer tent as usual kept visitors satisfied, while children were entertained by bouncy castles. A & P shows continue to be a vital part of the rural community calendar, fostering a sense of community and facilitating interaction and learning between town and country folk.

The A & P show, with its blend of tradition does serve as a microcosm of the broader societal interactions that shape our understanding and perspectives. This reflection on community and shared experiences leads me back to the concept of reflexivity, a critical element in both personal growth and professional practice.

As I have mentioned before, being reflexive is about understanding and considering different perspectives.

It involves listening and reflecting on others' viewpoints, enriching our understanding through diverse perspectives and thoughtful exploration. As institutional researchers, we have a

crucial role in collecting and interpreting data to craft meaningful narratives for our institutions. When people share information through surveys, interviews, or other means, they are entrusting us with a taonga (treasure) that deserves the utmost respect. Faced with the challenge of reporting in a way that supports a particular narrative, we must think reflexively about how to maintain our personal integrity, while crafting a narrative that aligns with our values and responsibilities but also remains true to the knowledge and thoughts given to us.

The act of reflection, whether prompted by the changing seasons, cultural traditions, or community events, is a powerful tool in our journey of self-discovery and professional development. By embracing reflexivity, we not only enrich our own lives, but also contribute to the collective narrative, fostering a deeper understanding and respect for the diverse tapestry of human experience. As we continue to navigate the complexities of our roles and the world around us, let us remain committed to the principles of integrity and thoughtful reflection, ensuring that our work and interactions are meaningful and impactful.

Hei konā mai – Goodbye for now

Stuart Terry, AAIR President



EDITORIAL

Dear newsletter readers

Greetings to everyone. I hope you have all enjoyed your Easter holiday. Hopefully, you had an opportunity to get away, enjoy some time away from work, and spent time with family and friends.

In this issue of the AAIR newsletter, we look at some of the reporting associated with the Australian Universities Accord (the Accord). The Accord was released by the Australian Government at the end of February. Even though I am no longer active in the sector (since retiring), nor in regular contact with the Department on the ramifications of proposed changes, I can see there are many implications in the future for government reporting. It will be interesting to see what further changes are ahead in the May federal Budget. In some ways, I am happy I am no longer involved in the implementation of changes, especially when it comes to TCSI ☺.

We are also hosting another online event this month with Altis Consulting. Please remember to check our website and regular emails for upcoming SIG events.

Andrew Bradshaw
Editor, The Institutional Researcher

AAIR NEWS

Fellowships



AAIR member
FELLOWSHIPS

Advance my institutional research knowledge
Study at university
Attend a conference
Advance my career
Receive an AAIR award event

\$3,000

AAIR offers two annual fellowships
Raj Sharma Fellowship
Zimmer Travel Fellowship

Apply

Upcoming AAIR events



WEBINAR

AAIR and Altis Consulting presents

Debunking Power BI Myths

Hosted by Phil Stevens,
Principal Consultant - Altis Consulting

Debunking Power BI Myths

When: 8 April 2024 (12–1pm AEST / 2–3pm NZST)

Where: Online

Hosted by **Phil Stevens**, Principal Consultant, Altis Consulting

Power BI is the most widely used data visualisation tool on the market, especially within the higher education sector. This is because of the flexibility of the tool and the 'ease of use' it gives to businesses with any level of ability in creating data visualisations. It also only takes a rudimentary level of data literacy to be able to load data into the tool and create tables and graphs of information. Much like most things in life though, the more popular something becomes, the more it is used in different ways and diverted away from its original design or purpose.

Is Power BI not working for you at the moment? Perhaps it's not you or the tool that is the issue here, it's how it's being implemented or used. In this webinar, I will take you through some Power BI success stories, as well as provide insights into the 'best practice' way to use this powerful, often misunderstood tool.

REGISTER FREE

Rise or fall?

In the context of falling response rates to institutional surveys within the higher education sector, the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland are conducting a sector scan. This aims to benchmark the breadth of the challenge and efficacy of strategic actions for increasing response rates. The scope is limited to course/subject-level surveys conducted by Australian universities that are members of Universities Australia.



We have developed a short survey to distribute to survey/evaluation team contacts shortly for each in-scope university. If you would like to participate in this survey or are interested in discussing it via a short interview, please contact:

- Sarah Dart (evaluations@qut.edu.au)
or
- Lizzie Li (evaluations@uq.edu.au)

Our goal is to organise a joint workshop to share our findings and continue our discussions at the 2024 AAIR Forum.



Institutional researcher's corner

Five quick questions with Lester DSouza, Managing Consultant



What is your job title?

I'm currently working as a Managing Consultant for Dataly Actuarial, a management consultancy firm. I am also the Business Intelligence & Analytics SIG chair at AAIR.

Briefly, how would you describe your role in your institution?

As a consultant with over 14 years of experience in the higher education sector in Australia, my role involves collaborating with universities to enhance their data management strategies. Leveraging my expertise in enterprise data strategy and warehouses, I aim to help institutions overcome data-related challenges and make more efficient use of their information resources.

From your perspective, what will be the key skills, capabilities, and knowledge required for institutional research moving forward?

The advent of Generative AI (GenAI) is set to revolutionise institutional research (IR). While it's essential to embrace GenAI for its potential to augment IR, it's equally important to recognise the unique human ability to understand the nuances of data. Moving forward, IR will require a blend of traditional knowledge and cutting-edge GenAI tools. Sharing knowledge about practices, processes, and

methodologies will be crucial, as will the ability to work in tandem with GenAI to unlock limitless analytical possibilities. It's vital to stay updated with the latest technologies while also valuing historical methods, as they offer invaluable lessons.

What do you believe will be the future priorities or the emerging areas of interest for institutional research?

From researching online and my own opinions, the future of institutional research (IR) is expected to be shaped by several key priorities:

- **Data-driven decision making:** IR will increasingly focus on providing data and analytical tools that empower decision-making at all levels, not just for top-level strategy.
- **Data literacy and capacity:** There will be a concerted effort to expand data literacy among stakeholders, ensuring that a wide array of data consumers can effectively manage and utilise institutional data.
- **Economics of IR:** Balancing the supply and demand of information will be crucial. This involves coaching data consumers and managing institution-wide data and analytical requirements.
- **Research capacity building:** Strategies to enhance research capacity, particularly in universities, will be emphasised. This includes managing the balance between research and traditional roles like teaching and service.
- **Aspirational models:** IR will adopt proactive approaches to build partnerships and maintain a user-focused perspective, aligning with an aspirational model for institutional research.
- **Balanced AI integration:** The integration of AI and machine learning will be a focus area, with an emphasis on avoiding 'over-engineering' and ensuring these technologies are used

pragmatically within the research context.

These priorities highlight a shift towards a more integrated, user-centric approach to IR, where technology enhances human expertise and decision-making processes. The goal is to ensure that IR serves as a catalyst for informed decisions and strategic planning within institutions.

Complete this statement: In my role, I can't operate effectively without ...

... a cohesive team that is aligned in ambition, perspective, and passion. The success I've experienced in the higher education sector is largely attributable to the exceptional business intelligence team I led. Together, we achieved significant milestones, driven by our shared commitment to excellence.

Additionally, the unparalleled support from the university's executive leadership was instrumental in our achievements, providing us with the resources and encouragement needed to excel.

This synergy between a dedicated team and supportive leadership is the cornerstone of any successful operation. It fosters an environment where innovation thrives, challenges are met with creative/innovative solutions, and collective goals are realised.

[Connect with Lester](#)



Member contributions



Photo by Andrew Bradshaw: Sydney Harbour National Park, Sydney Harbour

Webinar Series on International Education data collaboration

For more than 15 years, the Australian Universities International Directors' Forum (AUIDF) has pioneered a data collaboration project to benchmark international education strategies across the Australian University sector.

To provide the sector and wider audience with a better understanding of the various international education initiatives undertaken by Australian universities and discuss the challenges faced by the sector, Studymove will host a series of online sessions to present the main insights from the latest benchmarking reports.

We invite you and AAIR members to join our next data sessions, where we will explore the latest results of the AUIDF analysis and understand how Australian Universities are executing international education strategies to provide better study experiences for university students in Australia.

Please find the details below:

[Session #2 Strategic Insights Unlocked: Collaborative Data for International Student Recruitment](#)

Thursday 11 April 2024

The engagement with international applicants is more complex, and universities face new challenges in the post-COVID environment.

In this session, we will examine the primary findings from the AUIDF Benchmark of International Operations to explore how universities are strengthening their international recruitment strategies and addressing emerging challenges to achieve their institutional objectives.

This is a highly recommended session for everyone involved in recruiting international students to study in Australia.

REGISTER

[Session #3 Global Engagement Amplified: Digital Tactics for Student Recruitment](#)

Tuesday 23 April 2024

The closure of international borders led to universities implementing innovative ways to communicate with prospective international applicants worldwide. For the first time, AUIDF collected key data to understand how universities implemented digital strategies to support their recruitment strategies.

During the session, we will take a look at the different types of digital strategies that universities have adopted and how successful they rated these strategies in supporting their overall international recruitment strategies.

REGISTER

Got something you'd like to share in this section? Email our newsletter editor.

CONTRIBUTE

QILT UPDATES

Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS)

2024 GOS May

The 2024 GOS May round is scheduled to launch on Thursday, 2 May. The Collection and Sample Guide, along with the Participation and Additional Services Form were distributed to institutions on Monday, 12 February, with institutions required to confirm participation by Monday, 19 February.

Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal (GOS-L)

2023 GOS-L

Since the 2023 GOS-L institutional data files were released in June 2023, it has come to our attention that there were some issues with the following dashboards within the Tableau workbooks that have now been resolved:

- The hierarchy in LF Classification was causing unintended aggregation when using the demographic selector or multiple years of data. The hierarchy feature has been disabled.
- The hierarchy in STCHOICE was causing unintended aggregation when using the demographic selector or multiple years of data. The hierarchy feature has been disabled.
- The GAS item dashboards were pre-filtered to show only those who were in full-time employment. This has been removed and an additional filter has been added to the dashboard which allows for filtering to different labour force classifications.

The revised 2023 GOS-L Tableau files are available to institutions on request. Please email qilt@srcentre.com.au if you would like to receive the updated version.

Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS)

2024 ESS Fieldwork

Fieldwork for the 2024 ESS continues with a current focus on collecting supervisor contact details from graduates. Surveying of supervisors will ramp up in the coming weeks as many industries resume work after the holiday period. Fieldwork for the 2024 ESS is scheduled to run through to mid-August.

<https://research.srcentre.com.au/ch/50197/2b6gr/2892160/MnqnA18ToNL64Ow6hNvURpVoPGYgKlqvz6WYI96.html>

CONNECTIONS

LinkedIn connections

Many of you will remember Andrew Norton (Prof in the Practice of Higher Education Policy at ANU), for his keynote in 2022, and other occasions. He has a very useful LinkedIn page where you can find lots of updates and opinions on the ACCORD.



Mark Atkins and Terry Smith are the joint Authors of Data Governance Needs Risk Management. If your organisation is struggling with information quality and data definitions, Mark's LinkedIn page is below.



SECTOR NEWS AND VIEWS

(Note: Future Campus dates are indicative of publication and may differ from their website)

Sharing defence research: there's AUKUS and everybody else. A Senate enquiry into the Federal Government's proposed Bill to control defence trade and research has attracted much attention, Stephen Matchett reports. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

The Dangers of Honorary PhDs: Diluting Academic Integrity. In the ever-evolving landscape of academia, the conferral of honorary Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees has become common practice, Rachael Hains-Wesson reports. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

Diversity the Direction for STEM Workforce by Stephen Matchett. The final report of the Pathway to Diversity in STEM review warns the work it is based on will be wasted 'if people endure bullying, sexual harassment, racism and discrimination in their workplace.' The report, commissioned by the Commonwealth, proposes 11 'structural and cultural' changes to 'increase the diversity of Australia's STEM system,' including:

- an Advisory Council 'with dedicated government resources' to implement a strategy
- creating 'safe and inclusive workplaces' including by changing Commonwealth Government 'grants and procurement processes'
- tertiary education reforms to focus on 'underrepresented cohorts' in STEM
- better practices to elevate First Nations Knowledge.

They make the case on two broad arguments, that skill shortages can be met by encouraging under-represented groups, notably women, into STEM occupations and 'a diverse STEM sector brings new perspectives, better problem solving, increased creativity and improved productivity.' And all are in the national

interest. 'Diverse STEM-literate people on boards and in leadership positions across all sectors is critical to ensure good decision-making in an increasingly technologically advanced economy. Retaining these people in these positions is also critical for ensuring that improved decision-making capability builds over the long-term.' To all of which, the STEM community responds with full-throated support. 'To achieve the richness of thought that diversity will bring, we need to work together remove the roadblocks that stop Australians from entering, or remaining in, STEM professions,' says Engineering Australia's Romilly Madew. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

Unis invested in ideas for the ask. The government wants us to double what we donate to worthy causes by 2030 and asked the Productivity Commission to investigate, Stephen Matchett reports. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

The National Tertiary Education Union is pleased indeed with the government's new industrial law. The lobby that represents university managements (ex-most of the Group of Eight) not so much. There are multiple wins for the union (staff right to disconnect, pathways to continuing jobs for casuals) but the one that really cheers the comrades is what happens when the Fair Work Commission gets involved in stalled negotiations. The FWC cannot allow terms which undercut conditions in existing enterprise agreements, any conditions. Wedded to your ale ration after longbow practice on the university green? It is as safe as hovels.

This strikes the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association as bad indeed, leaving in place work conditions 'that are no longer fit for purpose.' AHEIA laments it will lead to 'antiquated and unproductive provisions being retained to the detriment of staff and employers. Salaries are likely to be dampened without efficiencies and productivity offsets.' Unless, of course, it leads to union negotiators finding ways to use obsolete terms in old agreements as a way to bargain for more than they might otherwise have won for members. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

Shadow education minister Sarah Henderson warns against the bit in the Bill for Australian Research Council governance that gives the new board approval of research grants. 'Without oversight from the minister, there is the risk wasteful or questionable projects, which may involve large travel or other

inappropriate costs, will be funded without recourse. This shows how little Labor cares about safeguarding taxpayer funds.' So how big a risk? Senator Henderson also advises that, 'of the many thousands of ARC research projects, the former Coalition government vetoed just 32.' (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

There is a review of Commonwealth Government funding for the independent and unity-based organisations that research and debate on national security. Prime Minister and Cabinet has appointed Uni Queensland Chancellor Peter Varghese to 'advise on 'value-for-money, administrative efficiency, and appropriate levels of governance, accountability, probity and transparency'. Mr Varghese knows of what he will review, being a former head of DFAT and the Office of National Assessments. The 2023 Open Think Tank Directory report identified 63 Australian organisations overall. Optimists among them pointed to the areas they covered 'being in alignment with the national agenda'. Pessimists feared changes in trade policies. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

Skills and Training Minister Brendan O'Connor tweets (sorry, X's) that 'dodgy providers in the vocational education and training sector are on notice. Our new integrity legislation is aimed at giving the VET regulator greater powers to go after the bottom feeders who exploit students and remove them from the sector.' Removing exploited students seems harsh. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

Southern Cross U steps up for Lismore, again. The university will release 72 acres adjacent to its Lismore campus for housing development, sponsored by the NSW Government – there is no word on terms. SCU Lismore was a base for rescue and recovery during, and long after, 2022 floods. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

The Feds are insufficiently clued in on the characteristics and career pathways of the health and medical research workforce and want somebody to undertake an audit. The Department of Health and Aged Care also wants to know about 'areas of national strengths and gaps in capacity and capability.' Apart from curiosity, there is a reason for this – 'a number of past surveys and grant funding statistics point to job insecurity and attrition'. Concurrently, there is general call from the sector for support for researchers to be improved, particularly job security, training and career development/ pathways.' Good-o, but why not ask the National Health and



Medical Research Council, which people aggrieved about such as issues have been ticking-off for years. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

Just before Christmas, Education Minister Jason Clare pulled back original expansive ideas on the support universities must provide struggling students and the penalties for those that do not, as part of the abolition of the previous government's 50 per cent pass rate for undergraduates. The pass rate is gone, but now it appears the government is not much interested in what universities are doing to support students. The new additional estimates statement for the Department of Education allocates \$1.1m over four years to remove the 50 per cent from 1 January 2023 and 'increase reporting on student outcomes.' (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

Unis not stealing students from trades by Stephen Matchett. The expansion of undergraduate education has not taken people away from apprenticeships, according to research from the estimable National Centre for Vocational Education Research. The news challenges the common assumption that trade training is seen as inferior to university study throughout the community, and that the shortage of sparkies and plumbers can be fixed by comparative marketing. The NCVER finds that characteristics of students choosing either of the two post-secondary systems has not significantly changed since the creation of the demand-driven system in higher education. From 2007 to 2019, there was no alteration in post-school choice based on gender, Indigenous status, geographic location, maths achievement or having attended a public or private school. NCVER counsels against the now-accepted wisdom that VET needs marketing that promotes apprenticeships over HE. 'Rather than attempting to convince young people to undertake an apprenticeship rather than university, it may be more productive to focus on attracting those young people who have no clear aspiration to attend university or those with poor access to information about post-school pathways to consider apprenticeships.' (Future Campus – 22 Feb)



All Eyes on Canberra By Tim Winkler.
Universities Australia's annual sector

love-in promises to lure a who's who of the sector to Canberra next week, with high expectations that Education Minister Jason Clare will use his Keynote spot to champion his much-anticipated (and occasionally feared) Accord reforms. With detail of the reform package set to be released any day, the UA Solutions Summit provides an obvious opportunity for the Minister to seek to sell change direct to a captive audience – probably the one moment when the capital's coffee purveyors will get a moment's respite. The Accord is Minister Clare's chance to stamp his moniker on landmark reforms that change at least the face of the sector, if not the outcomes of upskilling and equity that it seeks to achieve. At the heart of the reception to the Accord will be questions of whether the sector will be more sustainable and more logically and effectively regulated as a result of yet another attempt at an extreme makeover. Given the challenge to assessment integrity and operational efficiency posed by generative AI; the slowdown in international student visa processing; and the need to replace the ERA research evaluation scheme, the Accord may face more questions than it answers when it first lands. (Future Campus – 22 Feb)

Reforms Drive Uni Funding Down by Angel Calderon. Past Federal reforms of higher education have resulted in some structural change but also a decline in funding for the sector. Over the past 35 years, Australia's higher education has largely been influenced by the 1987 reforms introduced by education minister John Dawkins. Of course, there have been several reforms since then, with varying degrees of success. In September 2016, Dawkins told the AFR that the 1987 reforms were completely out of date, and the fact that they have lasted for 30 years is 'actually a bad thing.' The stakes for Jason Clare's Accord could therefore not be any higher. Minister Clare will either be seen as a reformer, or someone who missed the opportunity to do so. Since Dawkins left his post in 1991, there have been 20 federal Ministers with responsibility for university education and many reviews. At the same time, there has also been a downward trend in Commonwealth generosity towards the sector – particularly in contrast to the non-Government school sector. In 2021-22, the tertiary education sector received 58.7 per cent of the amounts the Commonwealth spent on the pre-primary, primary, and secondary education sectors compared to 82.4 per cent in 2012-13. According to the

Productivity Commission 2023 Report on Government Services, 59 per cent of Commonwealth funding for schools went to the non-government sector in 2020-21. Once the Federal budget is released in May, it is likely that the Commonwealth will have a set of spending measures to boost universities' finances, ideally in line with the 2009 budget. These measures will help universities in the short term (two to three years) based on past experience, but we should not expect that there will be a significant boost for universities' long-term financial sustainability. (Future Campus – 22 Feb)

Staff Stressed Wherever they Work by Stephen Matchett. For four years, university staff have been working more and enjoying it less – but one key factor is likely to keep making mental health outcomes worse. A University of South Australia national survey found significant declines on a range of measures. While 20 per cent of surveyed staff reported signs of emotional exhaustion in 2020, 32 per cent did last year. In 2020, 26 per cent had a very high rate of mental injury due to workplace conditions, last year 39 per cent did – compared to 11 per cent across the economy. The survey also reports a range of digital stressors that are making work worse, instead of more productive. Just under 80 per cent of responders pointed to the digital tech demands in working from home and around 75 per cent of responders felt pressured to keep up with new digital platforms, but lacked the time to do it. (by Future Campus – 22 Feb)

The Australian Association of Education Representatives of India is petitioning the Australian Government over it 'randomly rejecting' student visa applications. To which they will get a polite response but nothing else. Christine Nixon's review of the visa system which found 'exploitation of the visa system by non-genuine private VET providers is significant' saw to that. The idea that international students are here to work, not study, is now strong among voters who do not distinguish between VET and universities. Want an example of how politically irrelevant their lobbies are? This is it. (Future Campus – 22 Feb)

In Question Time last week Industry and Science Minister Ed Husic was asked how scientists and researchers would benefit from the Government's income tax changes. The Minister answered with gusto, detailing the increase in take home pay for a lab technician and a scientific assistant. He also noted Scott Morrison was in the chamber, who has signalled his



resignation from parliament, but is yet to go. 'He's 'Schrodinger's Scott': both the Member for Cook and not the Member for Cook at the same time,' Mr Husic said, not letting reality get in the way of a QT jibe. (Future Campus – 22 Feb)

Uni Tasmania may have dodged a parliamentary projectile. The Tasmanian Upper House Inquiry into the University's Act ceases with the prorogation of Parliament for the election. Its terms of reference allowed opponents of the University's plan to relocate from Sandy Bay to the city to submit what a bad idea it is, which they did in numbers and at length. But the Committee's work continuing now depends on the will of the next Parliament. It's early campaign days but so far Labor and the Libs are not talking about the University's plan. As the Save U Tas campaign laments (via Facebook), 'what we know about the major parties' position on UTAS's relocation plan; They don't have one.' (Future Campus – 22 Feb)

Adelaide merger carpet is looking less magic by Stephen Matchett. The warp and weft of South Australia's university merger is starting to unravel. It's coming up for eight months since the VCs of Uni Adelaide and Uni South Australia presented what Premier Peter Malinauskas demanded – an agreement to merge. And the loom really started to weave in November when Mr Malinauskas delivered the needed parliamentary approval. So far, so good and there is no consensus that the merger fabric is rent beyond repair. But it is fraying. Close observers point to three issues where staff fear they will not be heard and worry that merger management will not deliver on commitments to co-creation. One is the workload for staff knitting systems together, which many think management does not recognise. Another is curriculum and quality assessment - tasks that can take years in a faculty, let alone across a university. To tackle them on a tight-time line for what will be the biggest university in the country needs staff signed-up. Then there is the switch to 10-week trimesters. The July '23 merger plan called them, 'a preferred option ... subject to further review' but there are concerns on both campuses that the decision is made without staff being heard. The same applies to curriculum design, where people not actively engaged in the process worry models will be imposed on them. But all is not lost. Word is management-union discussions are frank and that staff will stay engaged, if management is seen to act on at least

some of what it hears. (Future Campus – 22 Feb)

Business R&D fertilised by buckets of public \$\$. When it comes to industry-based research, the green shoots Ed Husic extols are fertilised by public money – and lots of it. (Future Campus – 22 Feb)



Universities Accord Unveiled by Stephen Matchett and Tim Winkler.

Jason Clare has long argued that equity and prosperity require expanding all Australians access to a post school education system. The Australian Universities Accord, released today, is a manifesto for the change the Education Minister wants; but does not detail how it will be funded. While it points to ways to end the divide between higher education and skills training, it leaves the details of the change to an immensely powerful national agency which is proposed to take overall control of a national system. The report found that a significant change in direction is required if the tertiary sector is to meet the nation's future workforce needs - tinkering at the edges would not create enough graduates in required areas. Changing the shape and size of the sector to achieve parity of representation of regional, Indigenous, low SES and students with disability by 2050 is proposed to build graduate numbers, but will require, 'long-term planning, system-wide collaboration and proactive intervention by governments to reduce barriers to evolution and change.' The Accord makes no bones about handing the reins over to the Federal Government, stating, 'The Review found that improving tertiary education is too important a task to be left to uncoordinated action.' The Federal Government intervention, through an Australian Tertiary Education Commission, will be a key point of controversy in the reforms. Key objectives among the 47 recommendations in the Final Report include:

Equity and access

- 80 per cent of Australians with post-secondary qualification(s) by 2050 (60 per cent now) delivered in part by incentives for HE institutions that meet completion targets for disadvantaged students
- 'Fairer and simpler student loans 'moving towards a student

- contribution system based on projected potential lifelong earnings'
- More Commonwealth funded postgrad places to meet priority skills shortages
- A national student charter and ombudsman
- Payments for students on mandatory placements
- Greater flexibility in delivery to recognise students' needs and wishes to continue part-time work alongside their studies

Single skills system

- An integrated skills system codified by a national qualifications framework with universal recognition of people's achievement via a digital 'passport'
- Commonwealth funded 'modular, stackable transferable' short courses to meet changing national needs

Funding

- Change from fixed funding to a new model based on EFTSL, discipline and needs-based funding
- Higher Education Future Fund established with \$10bn target. Commonwealth to match contributions from universities own sources

Teaching quality

- Calling on Australian universities to use 'the full potential' of new teaching technologies such as ai to improve educational outcomes
- Establishment of a teaching quality framework with metrics HE providers must report

International education

- Government engagement in product and market development

Research

- New funding for the Australian Research Council to support fundamental research
- A National Research Workforce Development Strategy
- 'Consideration of the suitability and sustainability of the national research funding and governance architecture'
- Incentives for universities working with government, industry, communities
- 50 per cent target for funding indirect research costs
- A 'fit for purpose research' quality and impact evaluation system



First Nations

- First Nations knowledge systems and Closing the Gap through First Nations Leadership to become National Science and Research Priorities
- The establishment of a voice to the sector - a First Nations Council to advise Ministers and the Commission

Australian Tertiary Education Commission

- 'Policy coordination and development for higher education and university research' and joint development of policy initiatives on tertiary education with the Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council
- Pricing authority and funding allocation for the HE system
- The Australian Research Council, the Tertiary Education Quality and Skills Agency and possible the Australian Skills Quality Authority, 'should form part of the Commission.'

The Final Report can be found [here](#).
(Future Campus – 24 Feb)



University reform for a fairer Australia. Today marks a significant milestone for Australia's higher education landscape as the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) welcomes the release of the Australian Universities Accord Final Report by Education Minister the Hon Jason Clare MP. This report, termed a 'blueprint' for the next decade and beyond, outlines 47 recommendations aimed at creating a more equitable and innovative higher education system to meet the nation's future skills needs. The Universities Accord is a once-in-a-generation, top-to-tail review of our higher education system and addresses many neglected issues and opportunities. Towards the top of that list is the equity track record of universities where the opportunity exists to create real success for traditionally disadvantaged students. The work done by NCSEHE aims to help our universities improve to achieve a fairer educational landscape. Our target equity groups include: low socio-economic backgrounds, First Nations peoples, regional residents, and those with disabilities. The Accord report emphasises significant changes are necessary, not just minor reforms, including:

- Setting higher education targets
- Enhancing relationships between vocational training and universities
- Diversifying offered qualifications
- Reforming university funding
- Improving student support and repayment systems
- Enhancing industry and government engagement with university research
- Overhauling national tertiary education policymaking

It stresses that a more equitable and innovative system is vital, not just for producing skilled workers, but also for societal benefits like higher incomes and cultural richness. Most significant in the recommendations is needs-based funding. The Gonski model for universities promises to set funding for disadvantaged students on a proper footing. This will pave the way for system-wide reform, transforming the university experience for those from marginalised backgrounds. Yet success hinges on evidence-backed strategies for student equity, where NCSEHE plays a vital role. Getting suitable funding in place is a positive start and long overdue. It signals to Australians that universities are for all. The key now lies in how well this money is spent and in strong, equity-oriented leadership. NCSEHE stands ready to partner with all 39 universities, accelerating positive change. In line with the reforms is Friday's announcement of the establishment of the National Student Ombudsman—a critical step in addressing gender-based violence in higher education. It is hoped its role will be preventative in its impact, pushing up standards in complaints handling and in early detection of bad behaviour. It's crucial to remember—equity is more than just numbers. It's about what students access, how they're supported, and their inclusion in the university community. Along with the Accord, NCSEHE will create the momentum needed to ensure better outcomes for our students. Join us in the conversation for a truly equitable future. (NCSEHE – 25 Feb)

Education Minister Jason Clare has been clear he wants to take his time with the Universities Accord final report. As he told a Universities Australia gala dinner in Canberra last night, 'it's a blueprint not for one budget but for the next few decades'. He is not ruling many things in or out at this stage. One of the recommendations he has an 'open mind' about is a proposed Higher Education Future Fund. This would be funded by contributions by the federal government and universities and potentially support

things like student housing or libraries. While we don't have many details yet, the accord report suggests richer universities would pay more than those with less. So far, it is standing out as one of the most contentious ideas proposed by the report. Or as Clare notes, some universities 'hate' it. Writing today, Gavin Moodie details the complexity of this idea, including how it sits with the push for more research funding for universities. 'Asking universities to surrender some of their own funds for a communal fund seems to be inconsistent with other areas of the report,' he says. On other parts of the report, we already have an answer. One of these is early university offers to Year 12 students. Over the weekend (before the report was actually released) Clare announced federal and state governments would take up the expert panel's advice. The report recommends these early offers are not made before September of the year before students begin their courses. It argues a very early offer could see students disengage from their studies. Pearl Subban writes this may have an impact on those who do not perform as well under test conditions and those who also face other challenges in their life, such as poor mental health. As Subban says, 'if equity is a priority, it may be wise to rethink early offers for some vulnerable students.' (The Conversation – 28 Feb)



10 ACCORD Issues Beneath the Radar – for Now by Tim Winkler.

Sunday 25 Feb: Cue trumpets and photographers. Minister Clare and Professor O'Kane release Accord Final report.
Monday 26 Feb: Cue suppressed sighs of relief (no international student levy) and applause (we love you Jason, because you say you love us).
Monday 11 Mar: Accord? What Accord? Two weeks on from the release of the document that was supposed to plot the greatest reform of higher education in a decade and the Australian Universities Accord is, well... not forgotten; but barely a blip in the nation's heart monitor.

By being so broad – with so many worthy objectives and so few prioritised costings – the Accord architects have left Jason Clare with a restaurant menu rather than a roadmap.



With a rationale of change being expensive and the Accord revolution unfurling slowly, Jason Clare has been provided with cover for the duration of his stint as Education Minister – able to choose low cost wins from the Accord laundry list without blowing his political capital with the Expenditure Review Committee or the sector, on the understanding that more will always be done next year.

If Clare wishes to be remembered as a generational engineer of constructive change alongside Dawkins, then he will need to move fast across a range of fronts, given Professor O’Kane’s torch has illuminated so many areas of the post-school sector requiring reform.

While the Education Minister bides his time to unveil his next move in responding to the Accord, here is a sample of 10 of the less-discussed issues that the Accord has highlighted which we believe are worthy of further consideration.

1. Degree pricing – The Australian Tertiary Education Commission would have pricing authority and funding authority for the HE sector (Recommendation 30 pp32-33). The ATEC is tasked with achieving something that no university has so far managed – bulletproof pricing models for degrees. (what is the cost of maintaining a sandstone brand and old school tie network to underpin the value of their degrees? Is pure research in philosophy apportioned only to the cost of arts degree delivery or to all degrees? How do we account for the invisible unpaid work of staff in delivery?) Good luck, team ATEC.
2. Student contributions should reflect future earnings (Recommendation 41 pp.39). Given that on recent figures just 1 in 12 law students practiced law, what does that mean for the cost of a law degree? And what of the starving fine arts graduates? Do their collective earnings reduce the price of a fine arts degree to a handful of beans and a well-pressed barista shirt?
3. Proving HE is critical (pp1). The Accord report asserts that, ‘The major problems we face – including threats to our social cohesion – are ultimately problems for which a big part of the answer is tertiary education.’ The sector agrees, but how many voters believe that?
4. ‘Equity ... provides an answer to meeting Australia’s skills needs. (pp2.) Does it really? Did anyone stop to ask

the equity students? Is the aspiration campaign (Recommendation 11 pp.23) supposed to transform their aspirations from would-be panel beaters to aged care workers?

5. What about the robots? The report mentions the importance of AI and new technologies in improving teaching and learning, but what about replacing the dreary jobs and reducing our need for a vast human workforce? The estimates of future workforce demand bear far greater scrutiny.
6. A Jobs Broker is proposed (Recommendation 7, pp19) to help tertiary students find work and placements – a service to be paid for by employers. Given the majority of students already have to work to make ends meet, and there are careers offices at most institutions, the viability of the Jobs Broker seems dubious.
7. Early offers are banned until September each year until 2026 (Recommendation 20, pp26)– this one really was surely dreamed up by people who have never worked at the recruitment coalface. So, I can’t give Charlotte an early offer right now, but here is a conditional place/prospective scholarship/picture of an empty seat with her name on it/ actual empty seat with her name on it; any or all of which means that Charlotte knows she will get an offer in the mail on 1 Sept. Impact on admissions integrity: zero. Number of appeased headmasters of expensive schools for about six months: hundreds.
8. Tax on high fee courses – Recommendation 17c (pp25) proposes that higher education providers charging more than \$40,000 for an EFT load course be required to invest an (unspecified) proportion of income earned back into scholarships and bursaries. Given many providers offer scholarships and bursaries to some international students to offset / discount high fee costs, is the intention to make this approach more widespread?
9. Needs-based funding impact – The report recommends (Recommendation 13 pp23) that Universities are to get more funding for each student from regional areas, low SES backgrounds, Indigenous students and/or students with a disability. Will that lead to city universities seeking to poach more students from rural areas? Should universities without adequate support services get an equal crack at the high value student market?

10. A National Regional U? – The Regional Education Commissioner has to work out whether we need a shiny new National Regional University by June 2025 (recommendation 39 e) at the same time as regional universities are slung more money to address the higher delivery costs in regional areas. Given that RUN unis have already opposed the new regional mega-uni, and given that city unis may also compete more heavily for high value regional students. This will be a complex task for the Commish.

Yes, we did read past page 40, (41 was a ripper) and we did make a list of other page turners, but will save that for another week. The Accord is labyrinthine – we do it a disservice not to dive into its depths.

Future Campus will be hosting more online panel discussions with key experts to look at the future of the sector in coming months, creating a space to hold new conversations about the Accord and its implementation. (Future Campus – 11 Mar)



Unlocking Secrets of Ghost Students by Stephen Matchett. Students who never submit any work in their first course are ‘zero fails’ and while they generally disappear, they do leave with one memorable outcome – a study debt. Neil van der Ploeg and Charles Sturt U colleagues think universities have a responsibility to help, so they looked at the performance of 32,000 CSU students in a new paper.

What they found:

Zero fails aren’t all ghosts who enrol, but never engage. Some, it seem do have a go – only 24% never engage with the learning management system. Although 45% of those who did engage were gone by census date, nearly 12% were still there at Semester end. On-line students are a greater risk of zero fail than similar campus-based students, but First Nations and disability students are the only equity groups at marked zero fail risks. A First Semester zero fail sends a message that most get – more than half withdrew afterwards. Of those who stick for second Semester, 63% have more zero fails, while 17% pass most units. The headline



result is that zero fails are never less than 17% of all fails.

What universities can do:

'Look beyond first year retention ... retaining more students with a history of zero-fail grades may not be a great outcome, unless students' likelihood of success can actually be improved.' Better explain census dates and do more to advise students already at risk of zero fails. That means looking for work not submitted, rather than just LMS activity. As co-author Kelly Linden and Chris Campbell wrote in Campus Morning Mail (24 July 2022). 'a timely, targeted phone support to disengaged students pre census,' can reduce the risk of zero-fails and increase the chance of a pass or credit. (Future Campus – 18 Mar)

How VET Could Eat Universities' Lunch by Stephen Matchett. The Universities Accord recommends universities collaborate on 'innovative curriculum,' the VET sector is already on to it. There is a utilitarian emphasis in the Accord, a focus on skills rather than scholarship, an implicit assumption that education is about employment for graduates and economic growth for government. It's gone unchallenged so far, perhaps the humanities and pure research lobbies are so glad to be rid of coalition ministers who did not disguise their contempt that they will wear whatever the government wants – and that is a post-school system that emphasises skills for jobs. The problem for higher education course creators, whose ideals of autonomy are not amenable to national cross-sector skills pathways is that, for once, the vast bureaucracies that create training curricula have advantages individual universities cannot match. For anybody who watched previous attempts to create a national training system flounder in the face of indifference and inertia from the state TAFEs this will seem less unlikely than impossible. Certainly training curricula reform will depend on the authority of Jobs and Skills Australia ('the Australian National Training Authority, of not so fond memory but bulked-up,' a veteran observer of Federalism in training suggests). But maybe the times are suiting training in ways where individual universities cannot compete, at least in creating qualifications, with broad occupational competencies, plus generic skills – and that bridge the less divide than chasm now separating training and HE. The prospect of an individual university negotiating pathways with TAFEs for all the vocations they both teach seems unlikely. The Accord also includes a

recommendation (38) that could mean TAFE's would not even bother in growth fields. Mary O'Kane and colleagues, propose the Commonwealth encourage and assist TAFEs to become self-accrediting organisations in higher education. Plus, they could be self-accrediting for VET diploma courses, 'in areas of national priority, starting with areas such as net zero emissions, care and digitisation.' An expert group reporting to the Commonwealth and State Skills and Training Minister's minico, chaired by TAFE policy veteran Craig Robertson, is on to this. Its new [report](#) on qualification reform sets out what VET must deliver, because the world of work voced was created to serve no longer exists; 'higher order knowledge and skills ... across a far larger proportion of the labour market and society than when the VET qualifications system was first designed in the 1980's. There is an increasing need for technical skills to be supported by knowledge in order to prepare students for the jobs of the future.' And so what VET provides must change; 'both knowledge and skills are core prerequisites for secure work and provide the foundation for lifelong learning as individual and employer needs change. Use of digital tools and automation of routine tasks is driving the reorganisation of work, and all workers need knowledge and skills to navigate blurring boundaries.' How to create qualification models to accomplish this is bewildering in complexity and may well fall victim to TAFE systems that don't want to change – or can't. But the report makes plain VET needs to change, 'students transitioning to Higher Education struggle to gain credit for VET qualifications due to uncertainty about how performance-based competency can be translated or trusted as a proxy of learning and knowledge which underpins higher education. Transition and credit recognition between VET and Higher Education are now critical issues for many industries, as they build knowledge and skills across their workforce and redistribute work roles.' If whole State systems can do this, voced could eat a big slice of higher education's lunch. (Future Campus – 18 Mar)



[Working from Home: Less Privilege More Right](#) by Stephen Matchett. Working from home two or three days a week does not reduce productivity and is

preferred by most office workers, according to the Fair Work Commission, which wonders whether it should be codified in industrial agreements. And so it asked for ideas. Including from higher-education land, where academics, have ample of experience of the office, research space and the classroom, being wherever they want them to be. In 2018, La Trobe U tried, just not for long, to make being on campus mandatory for the working week (Campus Morning Mail, July 6). But the pandemic expanded working from home to professional staff and it became a union ask in the recent, eighth round of enterprise bargaining across HE – in line with FWC commentary on work and care in awards. "Flexibility in working arrangements, including modified hours, working from home or job sharing, can assist carers to balance care responsibilities with paid work. Australia has witnessed a significant shift towards more flexible working arrangements. This has enabled more people, particularly women, to balance work and caring responsibilities throughout key life stages," the Commission claims. The National Tertiary Education Union's submission to the commission calls for WFH to be inserted in the higher education award for professional staff, the safety net, beneath university-specific enterprise agreements. The union wants staff, individually and collectively to be able to request WFH, which managements can only refuse if the application is unreasonable and cannot be accommodated. But managements are keen to see staff and students on campus, presumably because acres of expensive real estate empty is a bad look for the international students who pay the bills. As Uni Melbourne provost Nicola Phillips put it post-pandemic, when the university ordered staff to be on campus for three days a week, "our campuses remain our principal place of work. Being part of campus life is how we can all play our part in creating a vibrant and supportive scholarly community, where both students and staff thrive," (CMM February 9 2022). And the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association, which represents most universities, (Uni Melbourne not among them), argues its members have working from home covered, without need for it to be in awards. "Universities have various cohorts of employees working a 'hybrid' mix of office/work from



home arrangements, while other employees are working predominately remotely (e.g. research only staff). Others attend work site full-time (e.g. front line staff/technical staff/student counsellors/library staff)."

However, if the Commission decides WFH should be an award condition there will be no point for universities trying to bargain their way out of it in enterprise agreements. And a presumption in favour of WFH in new Commonwealth public service terms may encourage the commission to do it.

For academics who are not slaves to all-day, every-day in the office, this may not seem much of a deal, but for professional staff, the possibility of reduced or abolished commutes will be liberating. The challenge for managements may be what to do with all the office space they don't need. (Future Campus – 20 Mar)

Unis Aus makes a (somewhat) new case for funding by Stephen Matchett.

Researchers believe government would sign blank funding cheques if only voters knew the wonders they work on. Universities Australia has had cracks at campaigns advertising science gee-whizzery on that assumption, but they made few inroads to voters hearts or Treasury's coffers. Now UA is having a another go, with a new(ish) 'communications' campaign. : 'Universities matter because of what matters to us' is the pitch. It's a new brand campaign for the sector as a whole, which goes beyond previous 'Australian researchers invented the thingatron so hand over the cash' approaches. For a start, it is designed for Australia now, where masses of people with no previous engagement with universities have a son at one, studying to be a nurse, a daughter in a teaching course. An Australia where people want to know what they and their families get in return for funding universities. Thus UA's new messages is, 'universities matter because we need' followed by a host of variables ranging from the generic 'better treatments and cures' to 'more aged-care nurses' and 'to keep our farms biosecure.' Staff in the humanities and discovery research could be forgiven for wondering why the spotlight has barely touched them, but it's a campaign that is another attempt to present universities as practical institutions addressing practical problems. The campaign website pulls together a chorus-line of research stories giving careful weighting to each institution, presumably based on campaign research that shows science breakthroughs are what voters value.

Plus, the last time a government talked up the society-changing power of technology and innovation, Prime Minister Turnbull nearly lost the 2016 election. When he said 'innovation' people heard 'unemployment.' 'Universities matter' extends UA's 2018-19 'university research changes lives' social media campaign which included researchers taking about their work and people who it helped describing the difference it made. Strong messages, but made at a glacial pace. The impact of Universities Matter will be monitored carefully to see if it can have a greater impact on the hearts and minds of the Australian voting public. (Future Campus – 20 Mar)

The week that was (22 March) by Stephen Matchett.

Wearing his Universities Australia hat, David Lloyd (Uni SA VC) has questions about how the all-but announced Australian Tertiary Education Commission will work. He also wants his members to be involved in designing it. In the released text of a speech yesterday he asked.

- How big will it be?
- How far will its powers extend?
- Will it add value or just add another layer of red tape?
- How will it differ to the functions already within the Department of Education?
- Does it make sense for the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency and the Australian Research Council to sit within the ATEC structure?
- Is it a permanent body or does it have a finite life span?

'I urge the Government to include the sector in any design process around such significant structural reform,' he said. If the government adopts the O'Kane Accord's recommendations for the commission as is, some of Professor Lloyd's questions are already answered, including the extent of its authority – to infinity and beyond is the short answer. (In Future Campus, Monday - what the TEC will be; 'too powerful for any HE lobby to take on and too much trouble for any conservative minister to fight.')

(Future Campus – 22 Mar)

Sceptics suggest the Accord's vision for 'a more seamless tertiary education system' may join the less-bunch-than-inflorescence of ideas for voced reform that have bloomed and/or withered across the decades. Now where do you suppose they would get that idea? Maybe

from contemplating the update to the estimable National Centre for Vocational Education Research's [timeline](#) of VET policy initiatives, 1998-2023. You can't fault a generation of officials for being game to have a go – even if much of their well-intended effort went nowhere. (Future Campus - 22 Mar)

Susan Templeman (Labor NSW) spoke in the Reps the other day about 'placement poverty.' - which slugs students who have to give up job while they do work pracs as part of a course, like her son Harry who is studying to be a primary school teacher. 'This is one. of the things we need to do to help students with the cost of living and to help people from poorer backgrounds get through uni and not quit simply because they can't afford to do their compulsory placement,' she said. Gosh, Future Campus wonders, could there be something about this in the budget? (Future Campus - 22 Mar)

The bill enacting most of the recommendations in the Sheil Review of the Australian Research Council Act has passed the Senate, where there was more of the same from the Greens and coalition – which will suit the government just fine. Opposition Senators fulminated that there would not be enough Ministerial oversight of research funding. The Greens complained that there would be too much. Both sets were playing to their respective bases while the government got what it surely wanted. The debate made the Coalition look hostile to any ideas which will not improve combine harvester technology. The Greens wanting more independence for the ARC's new Board makes them look like they oppose the idea of researchers having to answer to anybody actually elected. The Government comes out looking balanced and moderate, plus the Bill actually leaves the Minister in charge. The Bill allows vetoes of research funding, 'when the Minister has concerns related to the research program's impact on security, defence, or international relations,' which could mean whatever a Minister with an imaginative research advisor wants. More importantly, the Bill also gives the Minister the power to pick projects from three design-applied research Linkage Programmes as long as they meet process requirements. The overall result is that the Government will have applied research to promote, thus stealing the Coalition's thunder, while appearing to respect researchers, starving the Greens (the real opposition on HE issues) of oxygen. (Future Campus – 22 Mar)



[Ever since the WA Government announced a universities merger inquiry, Murdoch U has assiduously announced achievements.](#) Like the exhibition from its art collection, now on at Parliament House, which may demonstrate what a splendid job it is doing un-merged. Given MPs would have to vote on legislation to merge MU with another uni, (Curtin is widely mentioned) this might help. Just not with Parliamentarians who wonder why a university that ran a \$37m loss on \$365m continuing income in 2022 has an art collection at all. (Future Campus – 22 Mar)

[Charles Darwin U continues its long march to a med school](#) with news that the university is working to develop Western Sydney U's medicine curriculum for the Northern Territory. It is the outcome of work by the pair that started in August 2022. The process is taking longer than CDU's Scott Bowman hoped – he originally wanted med students enrolled by 2023. But it is starting to look like a certainty. In March the national Department of Health granted CDU \$2.8m for 'preliminary work to explore the establishment' of an NT med school. (Future Campus – 22 Mar)



[One Commission to Rule Them All](#) by Stephen Matchett. In Accord submissions, lobbies pushed for a central agency to oversight universities. They got what they wished, with Mary O'Kane and colleagues proposing an immensely powerful tertiary education regulator.

Why a commission: Glyn Davis, former VC of Uni Melbourne and now head of Prime Minister and Cabinet, long advocated for a policy agency, to provide 'long-term plans and stewardship,' with members drawn from industry and the HE expertorate (Campus Morning Mail, February 12 2016).

A recent idea is for a commission as cordon sanitaire to stand between universities and ministers who do not know their place – which is to hand over the money and otherwise butt out. During the coalition government's free speech on campus campaign then Monash U VC Margaret Gardner made the case for a 'buffer body that would stop a lot of this tetchy debate,' (Campus Morning Mail October 13 2021).

We have been here before: Australian universities were subject to rule by expert agency, in one form or another for 35 years, until John Dawkins abolished the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission in 1987. It had developed a policy-making life of its own, including on connecting VET and HE and appeared less overseer and more ally of universities.

But there were people in the party who never lost faith in the idea. Then shadow HE minister Kim Carr set out the substance of a higher education productivity and performance commission in 2016, stating it was necessary to provide a second source of official advice and that 'university leaders have put to me for some time the need.' Senator Carr said the commission would oversee funding agreements and promote innovation. The then Office of Learning and Teaching would be part of the commission and the Australian Research Council would continue independent but within the new agency. The Department of Education would focus on 'back office functions,' (Campus Morning Mail September 24 2015).

The O'Kane Accord wants to go further: For a start they propose a 'tertiary education commission' to be 'single system steward.' Less steward than suzerain, wielding immense authority over funding in HE and encroaching as far into training as its VET counterpart, Jobs and Skills Australia would allow.

TEC's 'initial remit' would be: 'policy development for higher education and research, future planning, making mission-based compacts, pricing, funding allocation, accountability, data collection and transparency, quality and performance.'

The ARC and Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency would be independent statutory bodies 'within' the commission.

Note 'initial' because the Accord authors have more expansive ambitions for the commission, including:

- **leadership:** 'The tertiary education system is too important to Australia's social, economic and environmental wellbeing to leave its future to the uncoordinated action of individual institutions'
- **oversight:** work with professional accreditation bodies to develop codes of conduct. Negotiate the mix of full-fee and CSP PG coursework places as

part of individual university agreements

- **engagement:** with providers on what they offer international students
- **planning:** 'address the appropriate diversity of tertiary education providers of varying size, shape, purpose and location to meet national and place-based needs.' Not just universities, all tertiary providers – and that means TAFEs.

Plan and manage a new funding model: for each publicly funded university. In detail, quite some detail. For example with regard to students from equity groups, 'the commission would be best placed to assess the cost of meeting the needs of each cohort and determine appropriate loading amounts and distribution at the point of delivery.'

Expand, sooner not later: 'expand the Australian Tertiary Education Commission's role to focus on the whole tertiary education system, with governance arrangements reflecting the ongoing role of all jurisdictions in its future, and with expansion to take effect in the context of the next National Skills Agreement.' Maybe also include the Australian Skills Quality Authority, 'in order to reduce regulatory duplication'.

And create cadres: 'to build the evidence and expertise base necessary to support the Australian Tertiary Education Commission's core functions, the Australian Government establish a centre of excellence in higher education and research.'

There is more of the same but overall the proposed TEC suits the post-Covid political times, with the national government taking a Chifley-esque attitude to the role of the state in regulating the economy.

The Accord commission proposes a review of the commission every five years. If it is created and makes it through the first one it will be around for a generation, too powerful for any HE lobby to take on and too much trouble for any conservative minister to fight. (Future Campus – 25 Mar)



[Does ACCORD Grand Plan Require Subjugation of VET?](#) by Stephen Matchett. A major inquiry into vocational education and training backs the O'Kane



Accord and calls for 'seamless pathways between VET and university.' However, the first signs of pushback are emerging to what some in VET worry as the subordination of their system to HE.

The report of the House of Reps committee inquiry into 'perceptions and status of VET' calls for a 'roadmap to a genuinely integrated tertiary education sector.'

The Committee, chaired by Labor MP Lisa Chesters, recommends the Commonwealth and States plan for:

- integrated funding to support life-long learning
- targeted funding for dual qualifications including advanced apprenticeships
- pathways between VET and HE courses and qualifications with defined entry points and processes for credit transfer
- agreements between HE and VET regulators, 'to reduce duplication and streamline process;' and
- a national policy framework for micro-credentials, with a proviso that they cannot be stacked into 'full qualifications.'

Plus, Commonwealth funding for micro-credentials would only be available to students who have a 'full' VET or university qualification.

And the Committee points to 'real value' in establishing the Accord proposed Tertiary Education Commission, or something similar, 'with national oversight of the sector and a focus on better integrating VET and higher education.'

The interim report of the Bruniges review of NSW VET, released Monday, also backs the Accord – up to a point. Although their focus is restructuring the State's public system ('TAFE at the centre'). Dr Bruniges and colleagues support recommendations for cross-sector cooperation, such as piloting self-accreditation for dual sector HE providers and TAFEs which meet thresholds. However while there is an 'elevated need for a harmonised tertiary education system' the two systems must 'remain distinct.'

And VET system commentator Tony Palladino (NSW Utilities and ElectroTech Industries Training Board) raises a question that will soon be asked across the training community; 'could the Universities Accord diminish the value of VET?'

What worries him is that the proposed tertiary education commission will want 'to rope in a self-accrediting TAFE into the mix' and that overall the Accord is about 'an institutional mode of future delivery over industry-based needs.'

This creates the need, he argues, for a national apprenticeship commission, that can regulate practise and 'bring sound policy to bear and promote the value of trades and respective qualifications and skills formation.'

'Without a national body to lead apprenticeship and traineeship policy, the bureaucracy, including ministers, can have as many apprenticeship inquiries and produce as many reports as they like and add more money to incentives, but it won't change the trajectory of attraction and take-up,' he argues. (Future Campus – 27 Mar)



BIG DATA, DATA ANALYTICS, BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

Inconsistent AI Standards Create Research Mayhem by Stephen

Matchett. Journals are advising authors how to use generative AI for papers, but typically advocate their own novel approach. The result is a babel tower, where there are no common standards understood by all. Giovanni Cacciamani (Uni Southern California) and colleagues scoped academic publishers and scientific journals' guidance for authors last year – their findings are in the British Medical Journal. They report variations in what publishers and journals advise authors they can and cannot do with AI, including research, writing, image generation, disclosure and blanket bans on including generative artificial intelligence as an author. But while almost all journals have guidelines, less than a quarter of publishers do. The guidelines are all over the shop. 'Substantial heterogeneity was found in guidance on the application of GAI use in academic research and scholarly writing,' is the polite way they put it. Which is not great for researchers. 'A lack of clear and standardised recommendations along with frequent updates to guidelines places responsibility on authors to seek out 'correct' guidance,' the authors note. In time, research area-specific guidelines will emerge, but for now a 'set of broadly encompassing, cross

discipline, inclusive guidelines' is needed. The authors suggest hanging on for the Generative Artificial Intelligence and Natural Large Language Models for Accountable Reporting and Use (Cangaru), which a team including Professor Cacciamani is developing. The hope for Cangaru is that it will be a training tool for researchers, provide a framework for assessing manuscripts and assist scientists and policymakers evaluate papers. (Future Campus – 15 Feb)

New Strategic AI Framework Critical to Uni Accord Response by Tim Winkler.

AI strategy is a going to be critical in enabling strong sector responses to the Accord. Reports in today's Future Campus cover issues of staff technological fatigue – at the same time as students are understood to be using generative AI in record numbers. The key Accord goals of improving graduate excellence, equity of access and improved representation of diversity are all squarely impacted by generative AI, with the threat of compromised assessment integrity; exacerbations of the digital divide and misrepresentation of diverse groups all major issues for universities that don't implement effective approaches to address the rapid onslaught of new technological issues. Over the past few months, the AiCollab team have been working on a practical strategic framework for AI, to help shape the discussion and development of strategies that deliver improved outcomes for institutions, faculties and schools. We reviewed the strategy to a group of colleagues at this week's Future Campus AI webinar and will finalise the plan in early March, providing a tool and discussion point that may contribute to deliberations over responses to the Accord. (Future Campus – 22 Feb)

Exploring the Myths, Realities and Innovations of Generative AI in Higher Ed.

Technology is undergoing a relentless evolution, with AI standing out as a topic of ongoing discussion. However, before delving into the realm of the newest technology, it's crucial for higher ed leaders to have a comprehensive understanding of AI and its immense potential. (The EvoLLLution – 24 Feb)

Facing Higher Education's AI Future.

While there is much fear and concern around AI use in higher education, it remains technology of growing importance that institutions must embrace rather than ignore. (The EvoLLLution – 11 Mar)



[The Future Of: Equity in Education - podcast interview with Professor Ian Li.](#)

How do we overcome barriers to education in Australia? Curtin University's Alex Foot spoke to Professor Ian Li, ACSES's Director of Research and Policy to discuss the equity landscape in Australian higher education, and how things are moving towards a more accessible system. (ACSES – 13 Mar)

[Ramping Up AI Expertise in Your Organization.](#)

While it can appear daunting, AI has its place in higher education. But its proper implementation requires experimentation, safety considerations and recognition of the value it can bring. (The EvoLLLution – 18 Mar)

[New International AI Council Focuses on HE](#) by Tim Winkler.

A new international group focused on shaping the way AI is used in HE around the world has been established from a base in Singapore, claiming that AI is one of the greatest challenges facing the sector in centuries. Former NSW Govt Advisor Danny Bielik has launched the DEC in Singapore, drawing together 20 founding members from around the world including Melbourne Business School and Uni WA. 'It's the blind spots that often cause the most change,' Mr Bielik said. 'Already governments are creating regulations and legislation for the use of AI in education. They don't want to be caught out like they were for social media.' The group aims to share best practice and assist members in navigating change – part of a snowballing movement creating a dramatically new vision for HE in the wake of the spectacular growth in AI usage across the globe. (Future Campus – 20 Mar)

REPORTS AND RESOURCES

[Driving Inclusion with IT Leadership in Higher Education](#)

In an ever-evolving higher education landscape, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices must adapt accordingly, particularly within the IT domain. IT leaders have a pivotal opportunity to drive institutional progress by fostering inclusivity and amplifying diverse voices in shaping strategic initiatives. The EvoLLLution - 10 Feb)



[The International Student Enrollment Cap in Canada.](#)

As many learners look to Canadian institutions for educational opportunities, international students have been an integral part of the higher education system. However, recent adjustments to the international student enrollment cap compel higher education leaders to reconsider their strategies for attracting and retaining learners. (The EvoLLLution – 17 Feb)

[Panel Discussion on the Impact on Students, Institutions and Employers.](#)

Watch this webinar to learn valuable insights from a panel of continuing education leaders exploring the transformative landscape of microcredentialing. (Modern Campus – 20 Feb)

[The impact of increasing university participation on the characteristics of apprentices.](#)

The latest NCVER report shows that the profile of a young person who is likely to undertake an apprenticeship over university remains largely unchanged since 2007. Individuals inclined toward apprenticeships over university typically exhibit specific traits. These include being male, identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, being Australian-born, or having English as their primary language at home. When compared with their Australian-born counterparts, migrants and first-generation Australians were less likely to undertake apprenticeships. Instead, they were more likely to choose university education. The report also found that the share of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander commencements in both trade and non-trade apprenticeships increased between 2004 and 2021. (NCVER – 21 Feb)

[A President's Perspective on the Shifting Landscape of Higher Ed.](#)

The higher education landscape has not only evolved in recent years but has also undergone significant changes over the past few decades. Recognizing the extent of this transformation is crucial for fostering innovation and ensuring continued success as institutions strive to move forward. (The EvoLLLution – 2 Mar)

[A President's Perspective on the Shifting Landscape of Higher Ed.](#)

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[Government-funded students and courses – January to September 2023.](#)

The latest NCVER report shows in the nine months to 30 September 2023 there were 1 074 005 students enrolled in government-funded vocational education and training (VET), an increase of 1.7% compared with the same period in 2022. Government-funded students and courses – January to September 2023 provides a summary of data relating to domestic government-funded VET activity delivered in Australia. It contains information on students, programs, subjects and training providers. Between January and September 2023, there were 1 245 855 government-funded program enrolments, similar to the same period in 2022. Most government-funded program enrolments were in training package qualifications, which accounted for 78.9% of enrolments. The highest number of training package enrolments was in Community Services (216 110 or 22.0%). Certificate III qualifications continued to be the most popular level of education. Enrolments in Certificate IV qualifications had the most growth and increased by 11 655 when compared with the same period in 2022. Engineering and related technologies had 209 795 program enrolments in the nine months to September 2023, making it the most popular field of education once again. (NCVER – 5 Mar)

[Research Messages 2023.](#) Research Messages 2023 highlights the diverse range of research activities undertaken over the past year by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). NCVER's research is guided by Australian, state and territory governments and other key stakeholders to inform policy development and decision making for the delivery of quality VET. Our 2023 research covered topics including VET delivery and practice, VET student engagement and outcomes, and VET's role in skilling the workforce. NCVER also continued to communicate its new research across a wide range of delivery platforms, including the 32nd National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference 'No Frills', webinars, and podcasts for Australian and international audiences. (NCVER – 13 Mar)

[HEDx: Taking an equity lens on the change needed in higher education -](#)

[podcast interview with Professor Shamit Saggar.](#) ACSES Executive Director Professor Shamit Saggar has joined The University of Queensland and Universities Enable's Professor Paul



Harpur OAM in a timely discussion with HEDx's Professor Martin Betts on the Australian Universities Accord final report and its implementation in the months and years ahead. (ACSES – 13 Mar)

Strong employment outcomes for apprentices and trainees. The latest NCVER report shows that apprentices and trainees continue to achieve strong employment outcomes. The Apprentice and trainee outcomes 2023 report shows that 95.6% of apprentices and trainees who completed their training in a trade occupation were employed after training, similar to 2022. Most trade completers (70.3%) stayed with the same employer they had during their apprenticeship or traineeship. Of those who changed employers, 28.0% cited the main reason was they were offered a better job. A high proportion of trade apprentices and trainees (68.3%) who cancelled or withdrew from their training cited an employment-related reason as the contributing factor. Common reasons included 'the pay was too low, or they were unhappy with the workplace or conditions' and 'they were offered a better job'. Apprentices and trainees who completed training in a non-trade occupation also experienced a high level of employment after training (89.7%), similar to 2022. Both trade and non-trade completers reported high levels of satisfaction with skills learnt on-the-job, at 91.4% and 88.9% respectively, while 86.4% of trade completers and 88.3% of non-trade completers were satisfied with off-the-job training overall. (NCVER – 21 Mar)

Apprentices and trainees 2023: September quarter. The latest NCVER report shows that apprentice and trainee commencements increased by 22.2% in the September 2023 quarter, when compared with the same period in the previous year. Trade occupation commencements increased by 18.4% to 17 365. This was driven mainly by Automotive Engineering Trades Workers, which increased by 19.2% to 4 510. Non-trade commencements also increased, rising by 25.7% to 20 325. The increase was mostly driven by a 43.1% increase in Community and Personal Service Workers, which reached 9 000. Notably, there was a 30.3% increase in Child carer commencements between the September 2022 and 2023 quarters, an occupation that is currently experiencing skills shortages. Although in-training numbers declined between September 2022 and 2023, they remained 33.1% higher than they were prior to the

pandemic in September 2019. (NCVER – 28 Mar)

HE CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Click '[HE CONFERENCES AND EVENTS](#)' above to see all the events we have listed on our website. Below are just a few.

ATEM programs

The Association for Tertiary Education Management provides high-quality professional development and leadership programs for the tertiary education sector in Australia and New Zealand. Professional development events can be found by [Browse the ATEM PD programs calendar](#) or [Search programs and events by region](#).



Altis Public Training Courses

Build your Information Management knowledge and hone the skillsets required to manage the proliferation of organisational data. From strategic planning to implementation and management, our extensive suite of training courses provides you with critical insights and structured learning across the IM value chain.

Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, author of 'Storytelling with You'

Transform data into unforgettable stories with Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, author of 'Storytelling with You.' She joins host Jon Krohn for our latest podcast episode, offering mesmerizing insights on impactful storytelling. Plus, get a chance to snag her latest book! Watch the full episode here: <https://bit.ly/sds5757>

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

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

ATEM Understanding the Sector. [Explore the structure, governance and operations of your institution and the broader sector.](#) Designed for newcomers to tertiary education, and for those in specialist or senior roles that require a grounding in policy, regulation, compliance, risk, finance and strategy. The minute-taking and committee programs are perennial favourites.

ATEM Compass. Save the Date – Wellington, New Zealand. Sunday 26 to Wednesday 28 August 2024. Following the success of last year's first-ever gathering in Wellington, ATEM Compass returns to the Aotearoa capital in August 2024. Seated in the central business district, our venue is conveniently close to shops, cafes and restaurants. Wellington's vibrant waterfront is within walking distance. Use the [webform to express your interest](#) in this program.

Data Analytics micro-credential scholarship on offer – study for free

Want to upskill and be in demand in data analytics? Learn to analyse and interpret information, and take consumers on a journey through visually appealing and engaging insights, with one of our micro-credentials. We've created four data-focused micro-credentials – developed in partnership with IBM and proudly funded by the NSW Government – to help you upskill and take your career to the next level:

- Data driven storytelling
- Data analytics for non-data minds
- Data analytics for business success
- Data analysis and insights.

[Find Out More at Charles Sturt University.](#)

Data Science Melbourne

This is a group for anyone interested in 'Data Science'. We are not quite sure what the exact definition of a Data Scientist is, but if you deal with something generally related to converting data into useful insight then you will hopefully benefit from joining the group. Please follow the link to join in the group and [follow the events posted on Meetup](#).





INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCES & EVENTS

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AIR Webinars

AIR provides online resources, innovative practices, professional development opportunities, and training for AIR members and non-members and the higher education community, including assessment, planning, and related fields.

ON THE MOVE

Lachlan Blackhall starts as DVC R at ANU in a fortnight (from 15 Feb). He moves from heading the university's Battery Storage and Grid Integration Programme.

Barney Glover will become the first substantive commissioner of Jobs and Skills Australia. He starts in April, following his departure from Western Sydney U, where he is VC. He follows former Victoria U VC Peter Dawkins who oversaw JSA's establishment.

Jonathan Powles is new VP, Student Success at CQU. He returns to Australia from the University of the West of Scotland.

Fleur Johns is the new Dean and Head of Uni Sydney's law school, she moves from UNSW.

Carlo Marra is appointed PVC Health Sciences at Curtin U. He moves from pharmacy dean at Uni Otago.

Ryan Winn is incoming CEO of lobby Science and Technology Australia, starting in May. He moves from the Australian Council of Learned Academies.

POSITIONS VACANT

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Find a Job

If you have a job vacancy that you would like advertised through AAIR, please submit a job ad for consideration.

Advertise a Job

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

A great way to get involved with the AAIR community is to share your thoughts and ideas. Do you have something you would like to share with your IR colleagues? Please send your contributions to the editor@air.org.au.

A reminder about the organisations' social media links to keep you up-to-date and in touch with all the latest news and events.



ENEWS SIGNUP

 AAIR on Twitter [@AAIRaustralasia](https://twitter.com/AAIRaustralasia)



[Andrew Bradshaw](#)
Editor, *The Institutional Researcher*

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