

# Submission to the Higher Education Accord Process

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This short Submission addresses the following three broad areas for action with a focus on the higher education (non-VET) sector:

- 1. Improving leadership and management in Australian Universities.**
- 2. Encouraging multi-disciplinary research and reducing research silos.**
- 3. Key questions about research-only and teaching-only universities.**

Each area underpins priority actions identified in the Interim Report.

I am an early-career academic with professional experience in public management, policy, law and regulation. I have drawn on this expertise, in addition to specific research, to inform this submission. The views expressed here are my own and not those of my employer.

## 1 Improving leadership and management in Australian Universities

The Accord Process should increase its focus on the breadth and quality of skills that Australian Universities should support, develop and recognise in academic staff at all levels. The Interim Report's Priority Action 5 (that Australian Universities should improve their governance and role as employers)<sup>1</sup> does not go far enough to address current capability gaps in the academic workforce.

Academic staff in Australian Universities require the following skills and expertise, in addition to traditional academic skills:<sup>2</sup>

- Institutional leadership, goal-setting and implementation.
- Staff and stakeholder management and communication.
- High-level administrative organisation and decision making.
- Financial and technological awareness.

Unlike the public or commercial sectors, Australian Universities do not train, support or otherwise prepare academic staff in the above areas.<sup>3</sup> This is despite the increase in administrative responsibilities of many academics following successive organisational

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, *Interim Report: Australian Universities Accord* (June, 2023) 13, 129-138 ('Interim Report').

<sup>2</sup> See, eg, Louise Claire Maddock, 'Academic Middle Leaders, Middle Leading and Middle Leadership of University Learning and Teaching: A Systematic Review of the Higher Education Literature' (2023) 4 *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 357, 369-70; 'Professional Development for Academic Associate Deans in Higher Education: a Case for Decision-Making as an Essential Skill in Learning to Lead' (2023) *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, DOI: 10.1080/1360080X.2023.2223817.

<sup>3</sup> Maddock (above 2) 370, 372.

restructures and a reduction in administrative staff and support.<sup>4</sup> The Interim Report anticipates that such responsibilities may increase further (for example, in relation to the assessment of Recognition of Prior Learning).<sup>5</sup> Despite this, there appears to be little awareness or recognition by Universities that fundamental skills associated with people management, administrative decision making or the setting and implementation of institutional priorities are necessary or valuable. If the ambitious policy reforms anticipated by the Accord Process are to succeed, Australian Universities must be required to recognise, improve and reward the managerial and leadership capabilities of their academic staff.

## 2 Encouraging effective research translation and sharing

The Interim Report notes a range of mechanisms to enable University research to be shared and translated more effectively. These include enhanced university/government and university/industry collaboration; government use of research; and encouraging academic consulting. While many Australian Universities publicly embrace these mechanisms, they do not create the conditions for their academic staff to do so in practice.

There are three significant impediments which inhibit more effective research translation and sharing. As these impediments relate to Australian Universities' culture, policies and practices I have drawn on my experiences as a law academic whose primary area of research is in the multidisciplinary area of public health law and regulation. I propose three broad solutions to these impediments.

### i. Entrenching multi-disciplinary research outputs as a new 'normal'

Academic work-load allocation and reward models primarily recognise research outputs such as journal articles, book chapters and monographs. Typically these models only recognise outputs published in the Faculty 'Field(s) of Research' (FoR) to which the academic belongs.<sup>6</sup> For example, law faculties may only recognise articles published in 'law' journals.

This discourages multi-disciplinary research on complex policy and social problems. For example, research published in the *Journal of Public Health* on the effectiveness of vaccine mandates during the recent pandemic might be co-authored by academics who sit within the the medical (ie. public health, epidemiology), arts (ie. sociology) and law faculties (ie. public law and regulation). But a law faculty may not recognise that publication in relation to the law academic because it is not published under a 'law' FoR.

The Accord must introduce and monitor a mechanism to entrench multi-disciplinary research in Australian Universities. This can only be done by ensuring that multi-disciplinary research

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<sup>4</sup> See, eg, Peter Woelert, 'Administrative Burden in Higher Education Institutions: A Conceptualisation and a Research Agenda' (2023) *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 409. My acknowledgment of the impact and implications of such restructures should not be interpreted as support for them.

<sup>5</sup> Interim Report (above 1) 59.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Government, Australian Research Council, 'Classification Codes – FoR, RFCD, SEO and ANZSIC Codes: The Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC), <https://www.arc.gov.au/manage-your-grant/classification-codes-rfcd-seo-and-anzsic-codes>.

outputs are formally and equitably recognised by University workload allocation and recognition models. The alternative is for Universities to continue to operate under siloed organisational models which generate research that is ill-suited to meet the complex challenges we face collectively.

## **ii. The need to recognise and value non-traditional research outputs**

Similarly, Australian Universities do not generally recognise non-traditional research outputs such as submissions to government inquiries or contributions to public debate through the media or public forums. Many academics continue to undertake these activities because of their commitment to their field of research and a sense of public purpose. However, some academics are unable to contribute in this way because they are constrained by the need to prioritise University recognised outputs. This is particularly the case for early-career academics and those working on a part-time basis.

## **iii. Academic consulting requires relationship building**

As a senior public servant, I have worked with consultants and lawyers and have undertaken consultancies as an academic. There is considerable mutual benefit that can be gained by enhancing opportunities for academics to contribute their knowledge to government and industry.

Australian Universities appear to exhibit a variety of levels of maturity in their approach to academic consulting. Considerable work is needed via the Accord process (and after), and by Universities, governments and industry, to best enable academics to transfer their knowledge appropriately. This includes:

- Recognising and valuing the time academics should commit to building knowledgeable and trusted relationships for existing and future consultancies. The current practice of Universities is to only recognise the 'output' (ie. income) of a consultancy.
- Ensuring the integrity of the research process, outputs and consultancy relationship (eg. conflicts of interest; clarity of responsibilities; use of research).
- Providing practical institutional support and resources for academics in relation to consultancy contract arrangements.

## **3 Research-only and teaching-only universities?**

The Interim Report noted that Australian higher education might benefit from 'facilitating the emergence of institutions specialising to a greater or lesser extent in teaching or research'.<sup>7</sup> This proposal may enable more students to complete higher education qualifications. But the fundamental question is whether this proposal will best serve students, staff or the community as a whole: will it support or hinder the achievement of the fundamental aims of higher education in Australia?

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<sup>7</sup> Interim Report (above 1) 127.

In addition this proposal raises the following questions which must be comprehensively addressed before a reform of this magnitude is pursued:

- What is the incentive for making such a change? Who will benefit from it? Who will be most disadvantaged? Will the change create tiers of Universities and entrench elitism?
- What are the implications for the quality of staff that will be attracted to different institutions? Will teaching-only institutions attract less qualified and experienced staff?
- What are the implications for teaching and learning? What is the impact on the teaching-research nexus at a Faculty or School level?
- How will these implications differ between and within disciplines (eg. STEM; humanities; social sciences)?

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Accord Process.

Dr Penny Gleeson

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