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## **Submission to the Coaldrake Review of Higher Education Provider Standards from the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)**

The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) has been a national professional organisation of educational researchers in Australia since 1970. Our members include researchers from Australian universities; local, state and federal government departments; schools, early childhood education contexts, colleges and training organisations; organisations with an interest in education; and private research agencies. AARE works to advance scholarly inquiry into education; support the quality of education research; and promote and advocate for the positive impact of educational research on policy and practice in education and associated areas to enhance the public good. A core activity of the Association is to advocate for enhanced funding for educational research, and to advocate for university contexts that promote and provide for excellence in educational research, teaching, and service and engagement.

Over recent years AARE members have become increasingly interested in addressing issues related to the separation of teaching from research and research from teaching in higher education. We believe that this results at least in part from funding policies that have forced universities into looking for short term cost saving benefits of teaching only positions and increased casualisation of the workforce. We believe that such moves are a risk to the quality of the Australian Higher Education sector. We attest that such moves impact:

- Australia's ability to remain internationally competitive within the higher education sector;
- on teaching and research in education for the social good and national benefit;
- negatively on workloads of academics across all career phases, but particularly on early career researchers who are critical to a continued quality higher education sector in Australia;
- on adequate capacity to supervise higher degree research students and as such are already impacting upon current HDR students, and also on specific universities' capacity to provide high quality research qualifications.

AARE asserts that it is in Australia's best interests to implement policy that strengthens the relationship between teaching and research in Australia's universities.

As education researchers *and* educators, members of AARE understand that teaching is a complex, multilayered endeavour that takes time, effort, intellectual conceptualisation and interpersonal facilitation. The growing trend towards separating teaching and research, we believe, threatens to reduce

quality teaching in universities. Education researchers, more than any other researchers understand teaching and learning because much of our remit is to research curriculum and pedagogy. As many of our members are engaged in teacher education, we play a major role in teaching people to teach well. As such we have foundational understandings that allow us to offer particular expertise on what good quality teaching actually involves.

As such, AARE makes the following submission to the Review of the Higher Education Provider Category Standards. We have organised the submission on the basis of the questions posed in the discussion paper.

### **What characteristics should define a ‘higher education provider’ and a ‘university’ in the PCS?**

AARE’s focus in providing this submission is to discuss the issues as they particularly pertain to *Australian University* as a category. Higher Education in Australia has traditionally been focused on social benefit for all as a key feature, and AARE believes that this must continue. With the largest number of students of any provider category, the Australian University category continues to provide quality higher education across 40 sites.

Many Australian universities continue to rank highly in national and international ranking processes, and this is despite continued issues related to research and student funding over recent years. Policy in this field – including the recent decision to shift research funding to provide regional universities with some additional student places - has placed pressure on university budgets and student places. These decisions have impacted most on the humanities including in the discipline of Education. To provide the best education to a broad range of students, who will use the education provided as professionals across a broad range of disciplines and career pathways, AARE asserts that all Australian Universities must continue to provide accredited qualification courses across undergraduate and postgraduate levels, *and* conduct research in the disciplines within which they teach.

To move more specifically to Education as a discipline, we believe there to be no justification for separating teaching and research. Investing in the teaching and research cultures of all universities offering education qualifications across the full range of preservice to in-service courses, significantly strengthens the teaching professions and this has implications for quality education in early childhood, school, vocational and community sectors and beyond. In the schooling sector, where research has traditionally been separated from teaching, there have been recent calls for *research-informed* or evidence-based teaching (Gonski et al., 2018) as part of moves to improve Australia’s performance in international tests. In contexts where teachers in schools and other education contexts are now expected to deploy research and evidence-based pedagogies, their initial and continued education must occur in a context where the teaching and research are priorities. Graduates from education courses of study require highly developed capacities to utilise and engage with and in research in their daily work as educators. As such they need preparation that takes account of teaching, scholarship and research. This can only occur in institutions where academic staff are

researchers and teachers, and where they are expected to engage with their communities. This is only the case when academic staff hold teaching, research, and service/engagement portfolios in their authorised workloads.

**Are the PCS fit for purpose in terms of current and emerging needs?  
Why?**

The current Provider Categories Standards (PCS) used in Australia, fit with the established understanding that universities will conduct research, scholarship and teaching under the well-established premise that research and scholarship inform quality teaching. Research in the discipline of education has a focus on improved understandings toward practical application; discovery and innovation; linkages, partnerships and translation to policy and practice; as well as formation of new models and theories – and *teaching* in the discipline of education is informed by and informs all of these research domains. All dimensions of educational research, scholarship and teaching require ongoing investment if long-term national benefits are to be achieved. Any appeal toward savings to be made by decoupling research from teaching must be balanced against the necessary quality of research and teaching provided by universities. For Australia to remain competitive on an international scale and generate sound social outcomes, the impact and engagement of research, scholarship and teaching must be supported in contexts that recognise the important links between these dimensions of higher education practice.

AARE strongly supports the findings of the Bradley review (Bradley et al., 2008, pp. 124-125) which asserted that “institutions with a strong culture of research are better placed to ensure that students receive maximum benefit from research-informed teaching”. AARE does not support any changes to the PCS that would lead to an increase in education studies and training occurring in sites without research (under the current PCS these sites are called Higher Education Providers).

The implications for current staff who were employed as teachers and researchers by universities must necessarily be taken into account in any proposal to modify the PCS or the provider category held by specific current institutions. Academic staff who were employed as teachers *and* researchers require work conditions that provide allocations for research and post graduate student supervision in order to continue as researchers and higher education teachers. Teaching only institutions would be without capacity to develop future researchers or to support current education researchers.

**Should some categories be eliminated or new categories be introduced?  
What should be the features of any new categories?**

We understand the points made within the discussion paper that the current lack of explanation around expectations of quantity and quality of research within the current definition of *Australian University* could lead to the possibility of an institution with a very narrow offering of research, or without a breadth of study offerings, being accredited as an Australian University. However, as detailed in the scoping paper for this review (Croucher,

Goedegebuure, James, & Ahsan, 2018), the current situation is that Australian Universities offer an acceptable breadth of study options across disciplines that would fit within community expectations. Any changes made to deal with a *perceived* problem in the required breadth of study options required to fit within the Australian University category, must not lead to further division between research and teaching within current universities, nor the introduction of teaching only institutions for studies in education.

Recognition that there is already some division between those universities who have become increasingly research intensive and those who have become increasingly teaching intensive must not ignore the systemic and policy context, and continued under funding of higher education, that has produced any divide that currently exists. An assumption that better or ‘best’ teaching will occur in institutions that focus only on teaching is without grounds. Quality teaching in higher education must be informed by research. And all students regardless of which institution they attend, deserve to be educated in research informed institutions.

### **Do specific categories need to be revised? How?**

A key concern of the members of AARE relates to the definition of a university in which research “leads to the creation of new knowledge and original creative endeavour at least in those broad fields of study in which Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) are offered (Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 B1.2.3). We note that the current standards held for a university state that there must be a commitment of “teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to the systemic advancement and dissemination of knowledge” and that the institution is able to demonstrate sustained “scholarship that informs teaching and learning in all fields in which courses of study are offered” (Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 B1.2.4 & 5). We believe this aspect of the category of Australian University must be strengthened and protected if Australia is to retain a quality higher education sector. Recent funding cuts to the sector and recent changes in student distribution across universities that have resulted from changes to caps on university places are already resulting in an erosion between teaching and research in university work.

We are concerned that educational research is already being undermined or significantly reduced in a number of universities, putting at risk the future quality of post graduate student research supervision and support for teaching and research academics in those institutions. We note the growth of a trend in some institutions towards support of a small number of research-only academics as a substitute for widespread research, putting at risk the breadth of research in fields such as education and the capacity of Faculties/Schools of Education to sustain the inter-generational capacities required for strong research cultures. It also risks international reputations that encourage international students to seek places in Australian institutions, and the international networks that emerge from postgraduate research support, particularly in the Asia-Pacific. The heavy workloads of teaching-only staff, together with significant casualisation in the

sector - make it difficult in our field to maintain the level of scholarship required to keep abreast of knowledge and practice changes. This risks the dangers of loss of reputation and the level of student capacity on graduation.

In conclusion, AARE asserts that the broader socio-political factors and neoliberal economic reasoning that has shaped Australian universities over the last several decades has forced universities to choose between marketing themselves as research focused *or* teaching focused. This has led to the undervaluing of both aspects of academic work as research is measured through tighter means and teaching tends to respond to the student/customer demand rather than the relationship between research and teaching being central and valued.

We are identifying the need to retain, in the PCS, the understanding that universities will conduct research, scholarship *and* teaching under the well-established premise that research *and* scholarship inform quality teaching, and that a well-developed relationship between teaching and research encourages quality in both. Indeed, rather than changes which might separate teaching institutions from research institutions, we believe that it would be more productive to have conversations with academic staff, students, industry and the broader public about what measures and policy might strengthen the relationships between research and teaching as a way to better understand its importance.

## **References**

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