
Academic Board

Report of the Vice-Chancellor

I. Second Gillard Government's Higher Education Agenda

As a result of the deal struck with the Australian Greens and three Independent members of the House of Representatives, the Australian Labor Party has formed minority government and the following ministerial appointments of particular relevance to the higher education sector have now been made by the Prime Minister:

- Senator Chris Evans: Minister for Tertiary Education, Jobs, Skills and Workplace Relations;
- Senator Jacinta Collins: Parliamentary Secretary for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations;
- Senator Kim Carr: Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research;
- Hon Peter Garrett: Minister for Schools, Early Childhood and Youth.

The Government will have a strong focus on regional Australia through the \$9.9 billion package for rural Australia agreed upon as part of the deal with the regionally-based Independent members, in addition to commitments to restructure Parliament and the Public Service.

In his first Media Release, issued in conjunction with a meeting with Western Australian Vice-Chancellors and State Minister for Education on 17 September 2010, Senator Evans "welcomed the opportunity to confirm the Gillard Government's ongoing commitment to the [higher education] sector".

In particular, he noted that:

- the next Education Investment Fund (EIF) Round, of up to \$500 million, would be "quarantined to investments in regional Australia";
- the Government was "looking closely at regional loading which provides extra funding under the Commonwealth Grants Scheme to assist higher education providers with regional campuses to meet the extra costs associated with operating them".

2. Legislation

The Government has listed seven sets of legislation of relevance to universities for the coming sessions of Parliament:

- three concern creating a new quality framework through:
 - establishing TEQSA *[see further below]*;
 - establishing the VET equivalent, a national VET Regulator; and
 - tightening and focusing the ESOS Act following the Baird report.
- one to re-instate the student services charge;
- one is to implement the Government's changes to taxation benefits for research and development;

- two, to implement smaller changes to HESA:
 - to increase the FEE-HELP charge to undergraduate students (hence not at funded universities); and
 - annual update to maximum grant amounts.

Of particular interest is that relating to the re-instatement of the student services charge, the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities)*. The Bill will amend the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to improve access to amenities, services, representation and advocacy for Australian university students.

It largely replicates the Bill that lost in the Senate earlier this year but with some adjustments intended to make it more acceptable to potential independent and National party votes.

The Greens have indicated a desire to amend the Bill to give students greater formal input about how the funds raised are used. Such amendments might reduce the chances of support from independent parliamentarians.

3. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

Professor Denise Bradley, Interim Chair of TEQSA, joined the plenary meeting of Vice-Chancellors on 20 September 2010 to address a number of issues related to the design of the new national regulatory and quality agency for higher education which is being established by the Federal Government as an independent body with powers to regulate university and non-university higher education providers, monitor quality and set standards.

In her briefing, Professor Bradley noted that:

- legislation was likely to be introduced in the current session for implementation from 1 April 2011 or 1 July 2011;
- AUQA will transition into TEQSA with Cycle 2 audits to continue;
- the standards body will be based within TEQSA;
- TEQSA will be an FMA agency, with a Commission, and will be based in Melbourne, co-located with the new National VET Regulator;
- current Protocols will be turned into Standards.

4. Compacts and Performance Funding

In 2009, the Federal Government announced the introduction of missions-based Compacts between the Government and individual universities, to be linked to performance funding, and interim agreements with each were subsequently negotiated for the 2010 calendar year.

The draft template and guidelines are likely to be issued within the next week as part of a brief consultation process prior to meetings with each university commencing in late October: the meeting between La Trobe University and senior Government officials has been scheduled for 22 November 2010.

Performance funding will be formalised, and will recognise institutions' strategies and directions: it will be provided for both excellence and improvement. Indicators are expected to cover low SES enrolments, student experience, teaching quality and learning outcomes.

5. ERA Biological and Biotechnological Sciences Committee

Professor Nick Hoogenraad (Head, School of Molecular Sciences) has been appointed as a member of the ERA Biological and Biotechnological Sciences Committee, one of the newly established ERA research evaluation committees which will make decisions on grades awarded to universities.

6. Accreditation of Statistics Degree Program

In 2005, La Trobe University was the first Australian university to have its Statistics degree program accredited by the Statistical Society of Australia Inc. (SSA). This program has been accredited for a further three years effective from 26 August 2010 and is now the only Victorian undergraduate statistics program to be accredited by the SSA.

7. Indigenous Employment Strategy

At its meeting on 10 September 2010, the Planning and Resources Committee endorsed the *La Trobe University Closing the Gap 35 in 5 - Indigenous Employment Strategy 2010-2015*.

The Strategy, which was formally launched on 29 September 2010, builds upon the University's unique placement of campuses in both metropolitan and regional Victoria to assist in addressing the social exclusion and economic marginalisation of Indigenous Australians within those locations. It is tied to a larger program of Indigenous Australian student recruitment, community engagement and partnerships as well as innovation in Indigenous Australian research, engagement, teaching and learning. It ensures that the University is at the forefront of contributing to the achievement of the Federal Government's "Closing the Gap" commitment.

In practical terms, the Strategy commits the University to the employment of 35 Indigenous Australians within various roles across the University including academic and administrative positions over the life of the Strategy. It is also aligned with the objectives of the new Strategic Plan (*Vision 2015*) and with the requirements of the La Trobe University Collective Agreement 2009 which advocates the targeted recruitment of seven equivalent full-time Indigenous Australian staff members *per annum* over the life of the Agreement.

An Indigenous Employment Steering Committee has been established to monitor and evaluate the Indigenous Employment Strategy. The Committee comprises Senior Executive, Faculty, student and community representation and will report annually to the Planning and Resources Committee on the progress of achievement of the Indigenous Employment Strategy.

8. Accolades

8.1 Centre for Bionic Ear and NeuroSensory Research

Britain's most prestigious prize in surgery – the Lister Medal – has been awarded to cochlear implant research pioneer, Professor Graeme Clark AC, Distinguished Professor and founder of the Centre for Bionic Ear and NeuroSensory Research which spearheads the development of the next generation high-fidelity bionic ear.

He becomes only the third Australian to receive this honour in the 86-year history of the medal which is awarded by the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

The new Centre— headed by Associate Professor Tony Paolini – is expanding existing cochlear implant technology to include stimulation from hundreds of sites within the cochlear.

The Centre is working on how to produce the fine patterns of nerve responses for high fidelity hearing, musical appreciation and hearing in noise, as well as the relation between spoken language and Sign Language of the Deaf.

8.2 **Dr Marc Kvansakul: Young Tall Poppy Science Award**

Dr Marc Kvansakul of the Department of Biochemistry was one of nine winners announced recently at the Victorian Young Tall Poppy Science Awards 2011. These prestigious awards ‘uniquely acknowledge the recipients’ research achievements alongside their capacity and commitment to communicate science and its significance to the community and social outcomes’.

Dr Kvansakul’s research probes the structural biology of cell death regulation to help develop new anti-cancer drugs to target cancer cells and reduce the side effects of chemotherapy. A graduate of Imperial College, London, Dr Kvansakul moved to La Trobe University early in 2010 after receiving an NHMRC Career Development Fellowship and project grant. He has published eleven internationally recognised scientific papers and plays a key role in the University’s outreach activities in secondary schools where he works on science projects with year 9 pupils and teachers.

8.3 **Wurruker Award**

La Trobe University was recently announced by Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) as winner of the “University” category in its prestigious Wurruker Awards which are held annually to acknowledge and celebrate Koorie individuals and organisations who have achieved outstanding results in their chosen areas of knowledge and expertise.

The University won the award as a result of the development of a subject entitled “Encountering Aboriginal Victoria”. This subject was held at the Shepparton campus, and it included lectures, workshops and Aboriginal community speakers as well as meetings with Aboriginal Elders in Shepparton, followed by a two-day “On Country” component at Barmah’s Morning Glory River Resort.

Professor Paul Johnson
Vice-Chancellor

6 October 2010