



Australian Council of
Deans of Education Inc.

DRAFT

Professor Denise Bradley
Chair
Higher Education Review
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
Location 023
GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Professor Bradley

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) welcomes the review of Australian Higher Education and the opportunity for preliminary input from key stakeholders in the sector.

The ACDE is the peak association of the deans of faculties of education and heads of schools of education in Australian universities and other higher education institutions. It advocates for teaching and research and scholarship in the broad discipline of Education.

Faculties and Schools of Education produce the majority of educational research and scholarship in Australia. They are responsible for initial and post-initial teacher education for learners of all ages (early childhood, primary, secondary and adult) and provide further professional learning for those concerned with human and organisational development and learning. Their graduates work in formal and informal education settings in a wide range of occupations.

Our comments on the initial Terms of Reference of the Review of Australian Higher Education reflect our broad engagement with the teaching profession at all levels and with educational leaders in the public, private and community sectors and our role in educational research. We endorse the commitment of the Review Committee to using a research and evidence base, and would like to draw the attention of the Committee to the considerable research expertise within the Faculties and Schools of Education in relation to higher education policy and practice.

While we welcome this Review, we suggest that the current terms are quite restrictive and omit key considerations. We detail these below.

Omissions from the current terms of reference include:

- 1 There is no consideration of the relationship between levels of degree programs:- undergraduate, postgraduate and research; and the differential purposes and funding of these distinct programs.
- 2 There is no explicit consideration of the funding of teaching and research. The current funding of research in the majority of Faculties around Australia is primarily through T & R academic staffing positions and this is especially noticeable in Faculties of Education. The ACDE supports a broadly based funding model that does not fund teaching and research as entirely separate activities. Indeed the excellent performance of Australian Education Researchers within a global perspective (*Campus Review*, April 8th, 2008) has been achieved within this kind of T & R staffing regime. Indeed, our experience suggests that the most productive researchers in education are also excellent teachers of undergraduates and are engaged with teachers and the broader community in professional development activities.



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In our comments below we suggest a number of extensions to the current terms of reference and a change in emphasis in how they are framed.

- 3 The current terms of reference foreground Higher Education as market-driven and market-sensitive. This needs to be complemented by recognition of the role of Higher Education in fostering an informed, critical, and engaged citizenry. It may be that this democratic citizenship role of HE has been taken for granted in framing the terms of reference but from our perspective, this key educational role cannot be assumed and needs to be reviewed as a complementary aspect to economic and market considerations.
- 4 The current terms of reference also places Higher Education as simply responsive to labour markets and employer demand. There is an odd assumption in this framing of the issue. Higher Education Institutes (HEI) are by necessity very sensitive to demand from students and in recent years there have been large swings in demand for different degrees and HEIs have adapted flexibly in different ways to this market demand. But HEIs also create new markets and extend employment possibilities through the processes of innovation and invention. It would be unfortunate if HEIs were positioned as technical colleges responding to short-term specific skills shortages. The role of HEIs is much broader and includes the preparation of graduates with high level reasoning skills, creativity and inventiveness. This creative dimension needs to be considered alongside of the issue of employer demand and market requirements.
- 5 Generalist degrees in Australia are usually specified as Arts or Science degrees. In Japan, Engineering is regarded as a generalist degree that prepares graduates for participation in many different fields within the society. In practice many degrees in Australia function as generalist degrees for many graduates, including Arts, Science, Law, Economics and Education. The skills and knowledge developed by graduates from these degree programs can be transferred to whole range of careers and workplaces. There are significant advantages in emphasising the generic and transferable high level competencies of graduates as well as their specific skills and knowledge in relation to a specific professional role or to a specific market.

Yours sincerely



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