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Welcome to our October newsletter... delayed somewhat by recent events in Canberra.

It occurred as I wrote this that we really are a sector paddling furiously like a swan beneath the surface. I have been working with the university sector for some 16 years. It has often struck me how serene – and so frequently lush – campuses can look, regardless of what country you are in. They so often have this calm and studious feel that belies the constant intensity, the hectic timelines, and the outcomes-focused work ethic within.

And so it has been for the Go8 and its members since our last newsletter. Not least because we yet again have a new Minister who is the first to admit he does not know a lot about universities. With an election between now and next May we hope he will allow the sector the time it needs to have him up to speed enough for well-reasoned policy formulation on everything from international students to freedom of speech. Touch one wrong policy lever in the country you are in. They so frequently lush – campuses shine through. From every three contributing students shines through.

It is a massive thank you and farewell. It is a massive thank you and a goodbye until the next time!

Professor Davis loves university education too much to let go. So this isn’t really farewell. It is a massive thank you and a goodbye until the next time!
after nine months intense gestation, was the release in August of a first-ever forensic analysis of the Go8’s economic worth to Australia.

There is immense pride from all Go8 members that the report shows the strength of our economic impact – from the total of $66.4 billion every year, to knowing that our research alone contributes $24.5 billion each year; $1000 for every Australian.
A report by London Economics – “The economic impact of Group of Eight universities” – was launched by the Go8 Chair, Professor Ian Jacobs at the National Press Club in Canberra on 14 August.

It is the first economic analysis undertaken by the collective Go8, and the first Australian universities’ forensic analysis of their impact to the nation from one year (2016, the most recent year for which official data was available).

London Economics (https://www.go8.edu.au/Go8_London-Economics-Report.pdf) is one of Europe’s leading economics consultancies. Its specialist higher education team had undertaken a similar forensic analysis for the UK’s Russell Group of Universities and the Go8 had been impressed by its content and by the respect afforded the report by the UK Government.

“This led to initial discussions with London Economics in late 2017 and Board endorsement to commission the same specialist team to carry out a similar forensic analysis for the Go8 early this year,” says Vicki Thomson Go8 Chief Executive.

“London Economics’ consultants were in Canberra to coincide with the report launch, and specifically to brief a number of senior Government officials and economic journalists.

The headline statistics from the analysis are that the Go8:

- has total economic impact of some $66.4 billion each year
- research activity contributes $24.5 billion to the economy each year – $1000 for every Australian
- delivers almost $10 in benefits to the economy for every $1 of research income
- contributes $17.98 billion to Australia’s education exports each year
- supports 73,000 Australian jobs from income generated from its international students
- generates $1 million in economic impact for every three of its international students

Ms Thomson said an important statistic for the Go8, especially given it was comprised of Australia’s consistently leading research intensive universities, was that “every $100 million in additional research funding leads to $1 billion additional return. Conversely policy that reduces research funding by $100 million to the Go8 leads to a reduction of $1 billion in economic return. To us that figure was stark, and illustrative of our value and place in Australia’s economic future.”

Professor Ian Jacobs: VC, UNEW Sydney and Chair, Group of Eight

... delivers almost $10 in benefits to the economy for every $1 of research income
VC Views: The economic impact of Group of Eight universities

**Professor Ian Jacobs, UNSW Sydney, Go8 Chair:**

“The London economics report is further evidence that funding for our universities is not a burden or a charitable donation – it is a wise investment in the future of the nation which yields substantial economic return alongside many other benefits for the people of Australia.”

**Professor Dawn Freshwater, The University of Western Australia, Go8 Deputy Chair:**

“While Go8 universities have been delivering higher education and research benefits to our communities for more than a century, this is the first time that we have been able to quantify the benefits of a single year’s activity to the country’s economy. What strikes me is not just the direct value of our graduates and our research, but the broader impact of these on society and social cohesion through productivity and knowledge spillover effects, which total $31bn. This far outstrips public expenditure on Go8 universities, and benefits all Australians, importantly including those who have not had the chance to go to university.”

**Professor Peter Hej, The University of Queensland:**

“The report affirms the essential roles of Group of Eight universities in generating jobs, nourishing economies, and enhancing productivity.

UQ is known as a leader in translation and commercialisation of its research, and I am proud that our people lead four of the nine research and innovation case studies highlighted in the London Economics report. They are making global contributions to health, farming and fibre production, and crucial infrastructure.

But – of course – the impact we have on our communities, through our students and graduates, is what we experience every day, and rejoice in.”

**Professor Glyn Davis AC, The University of Melbourne:**

“Understanding economic flows is an essential first step to making good policy. The London Economics report makes clear the contribution of Group of Eight universities across the nation – and asks, inevitably, how we make more of this flow for the benefit of Australia.”

**Professor Margaret Gardner AO, Monash University:**

“The London Economics Report demonstrates that investment in universities not only contributes to economic growth, but that Australian universities make measurable direct and indirect impacts through their research and education nationally and internationally.”

**Professor Brian Schmidt AC, Australian National University:**

“The value of universities is multi-faceted, and easily taken for granted. We open a world of opportunity that reaches outside of our campuses and into Australian homes and businesses. Whether creating highly skilled and valuable graduates, or new companies and technologies, The Australian National University (ANU) is making sure its excellence enriches the nation.

As Australia’s national university we serve the nations interests by producing world-leading research and education that has international impact. We see every day the value of the investment in excellence. However quantifying that value in terms of dollars and cents is not simple. This research, funded by the Group of Eight universities, provides a greater insight into the economic reach of universities. What unites all world-leading research is curiosity and a desire to make a difference to our global community. That motivation is translated directly into job generation in our communities, innovation gains and economic gains every year to Australia.”

**Professor Peter Rathjen, The University of Adelaide:**

“This report provides an important analysis of the immense value of Go8 universities – and that we give back to the economy and society much more than the funding we receive. Research-led universities uniquely combine innovation, human capital and global connectivity and therefore have a special role to play in the transformation of our society and the forging of a prosperous future for generations to come. The London Economics report demonstrates just this, recognising the importance of higher education to economic development – in terms of direct jobs, the value of our research, and the growth that can be directly connected to our graduates. What we produce is now absolutely critical: smart, well-educated people who can carve out a future in the workforce, innovation programs that can give rise to economies that create instant jobs for us and for our kids, and global connectivity that is enormous in a world that is globalized.”

**Dr Michael Spence AC, The University of Sydney:**

“Australia’s greatest asset is its innovative population, well educated in a world class University system. The benefits of being a clever nation almost incalculable. But even narrowly defined, the economic contribution of our eight research universities is enormous.”

While this report gives a picture of the magnitude of the economic contribution that universities make to Australia’s future, the vibrant contribution made by PhD students and their influence on the world is harder to quantify. Whether it is a step towards curing disease, or it is research that contributes to our understanding of the history, politics and humanities, every step forward increases the intellectual wealth of our nation.”

What unites all world-leading research is curiosity and a desire to make a difference to our global community.
127 participants – both researchers and investors – accepted a Go8 invite to spend a day networking future collaboration and commercialisation opportunities, while hearing about the deep capability of Go8-specific research expertise in Genomics and Precision Medicine.

An important feature of the day was frank and outcomes-focused dialogue on the policies and procedures that needed development, and the communications protocols and ethical frameworks that required explanation to gain community trust.

Still mostly seen as an over-the-horizon prospect, rather than an already-arrived research and development sector by the community, gaining trust to advance understanding and acceptance was a major talking point of the day.

The participants heard from Minister for Health Hon Greg Hunt MP, (who is an enthusiastic and committed champion of Genomics and Precision Medicine); the Chair of Innovation and Science Australia Bill Ferris; the Chair of the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board Professor Ian Frazer, and the Lead for the Australian Genomic Health Alliance Professor Kathryn North.

The Speakers and the representative panels which followed each then had detailed questioning from participants and audience discussion.

The day was put together by the Go8’s Commercialisation and Engagement Directors in recognition of Innovation and Science Australia’s focus on Genomics and Precision Medicine in its ‘Australia 20130: Prosperity through Innovation’ plan, and to showcase Go8 knowledge and expertise in the area.
Temper tantrums may be linked to narcissism

People who are quick to lose their temper are more likely to overestimate their own intelligence, a new study from The University of Western Australia and the University of Warsaw in Poland has found.

The investigation examined the role of trait-anger (people who get angry as a disposition) in the overestimation of cognitive ability in undergraduates from Warsaw, Poland.

The participants were asked to answer questions assessing their trait-anger, stability, narcissism, and how they would rate their intelligence on a 25-point scale, before taking an objective intelligence test.

UWA Senior Lecturer Gilles Gignac, co-author of the paper with Professor Marcin Zajenkowski from the University of Warsaw, said the study found an interesting relationship between those with a clear tendency to become annoyed at things, big and small, and their perception of their own intelligence.

“Trait anger, in some cases, may be a consequence of less emotional stability, such as anxiety,” Professor Gignac said.

“However, for others, there is no anxiety fuelling the frustration, nastiness, and angry outbursts. Instead, for them, it looks like it may be narcissism. Consequently, when you ask this type of trait-angry person to rate their own intelligence, they tend to overestimate it.”

The study also leads into some important speculations that could be examined in future research.

“A narcissist, especially what we call the grandiose narcissist, has, as a defining characteristic, an inflated positive self-image,” Professor Gignac said.

“So, it’s not surprising to see a link between narcissism and the overestimation of one’s intelligence.

“The interesting element is that trait-anger appears to be involved in this process. It may be speculated that, for many grandiose narcissists, trait-anger develops over time, as they begin to gain some awareness of the difference between how important and good they think they are and what they can do and what they have accomplished.”
Researchers are helping to explain why some people anticipate and react to fast-moving objects much quicker than others.

When Collingwood footballer Jeremy Howe launches into the clouds to take a “speccy” over an AFL opponent, or Serena Williams returns a lightning-quick tennis serve – most of us marvel at their skill and speed. Considering what the human brain overcomes to make it happen, these feats are nothing short of miraculous. When we watch a moving object, such as a fly, we experience it in the present. But delays in how the brain processes the image from the eye means our awareness of visual events lags behind their occurrence.

The delay with which people make eye movements to a target predicts where they perceive the target. Failure to account for these delays will result in the mis-localisation and mistargeting of moving objects.

So to make it possible to swat a fly or catch a moving ball the brain has developed a way to overcome this lag. This means we are unaware of this delay and can interact with even rapidly moving objects – in the case of AFL footballers and elite tennis players extremely efficiently.

University of Melbourne-led research investigated this phenomenon and found that the delay with which people make eye movements to a target predicts where they perceive the target, and some people like sports stars do this better than others.

Lead researcher and Melbourne School of Psychological Science Senior Research Fellow Dr Hinze Hogendoorn said the brain then worked out what the target would do next.

“The cool thing about that is that the brain apparently ‘knows’ how long the eye movement is going to take, uses that to calculate in which direction to send the eye movement, and also uses that same signal to tell awareness where the object is in the first place,” Dr Hogendoorn explained.

Published in the Journal of Neuroscience, the paper looked at transmission delays in the nervous system that pose challenges for pinpointing moving objects due to the brain’s reliance on outdated information to determine their position.

“Acting effectively in the present requires that the brain compensates not only for the time lost in the transmission and processing of sensory information, but also for the expected time that will be spent preparing and executing motor programs,” the paper said. “Failure to account for these delays will result in the mis-localisation and mistargeting of moving objects.”

In visual motion, the future position of a moving object can be extrapolated based on previous samples. The team recently demonstrated that these neural mechanisms do indeed reduce the lag with which the brain represents the position of a moving object.

Dr Hogendoorn said the findings aligned with and extended previous research, by showing that motion extrapolation mechanisms were linked to smooth and rapid eye movements. As for elite sportspeople, he said they could have an inherent ability to process all this information faster and more accurately than others, or develop it through practice. Or maybe both.
Students gather to express views on university experience

Go8 members recently hosted student representatives from each of the eight universities at a “student summit” held over two days at UNSW Sydney.

The summit was the second in a series of such summits to be held across Australia with a range of different sectors to include business, industry, media, the bureaucracy, overseas representatives and unions. (The first being the social advocacy summit on 30 April 2018 which featured in the previous newsletter).

The students, with the group including undergraduate and postgraduate representatives, were encouraged to express their views openly so Go8 members and future students and young researchers could benefit from their experiences and suggestions.

The wide range of topics that were discussed, included impediments to study, especially cost of living and transport; how to ensure quality teaching and learning changed to reflect the times, so that it was presented in ways that most benefited the student cohort; balancing the freedom of online learning with the desire to be part of a thriving campus community; international students, their assimilation and ensuring they receive value for money; and the workforce and the value of a degree.
The University of Melbourne farewells a charismatic Vice Chancellor

As we farewell a giant of the university sector with the retirement of Professor Glyn Davis as Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, it is a time for personal reflection about someone who has contributed so much to a sector he cares so much about.

I first became aware of the name Glyn Davis in the late 90s. I was Chief of Staff to a South Australian Premier at the same time Glyn was Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet of a Queensland Premier.

His presence preceded him. Senior public servants and political staffers from my own region as well as others, spoke of the “unusual” senior bureaucrat who was not known to raise his voice. A man charming as opposed to friendly, quietly yet ferociously determined as opposed to strident.

Yet when he did speak, softly, any room listened. He seemed above the fray but able to control it at the same time. It was a method of management and use of power I was to become very familiar with over the following decades. I was in awe of that presence.

Lives moved on, and when our Premiers moved on also, Glyn Davis and I both found ourselves in the university sector. Glyn back to the sector to become Vice Chancellor of Griffith University, and me for the first time, as senior strategic communications manager for the AVCC that morphed into Universities Australia.

Glyn moved to the Go8’s University of Melbourne as Vice Chancellor in 2005. He took on the role of Chair of Universities Australia at the same time as his wife Professor Margaret Gardner then Vice Chancellor of Victoria’s RMIT (now Vice Chancellor of Monash) was my Chair at the Australian Technology Network of Universities, which I had joined as Executive Director in 2003.

His presence had not changed. Still calm and reserved, polite and charming and totally erudite he would and could hold any room he so chose in the palm of his hand. He was also able to cut to the quick without even drawing blood. A quiet sentence with a dagger’s power. How many Ministers one wonders have only belatedly realised as he took his leave of a meeting that they had been decidedly skewered!

And so Glyn ploughed forward, always making gains, delivering the “Melbourne model” of a generalist undergraduate degree before specialisation for his students. Just mention “Melbourne model” from Delhi to Beijing, London to New York, Boston and California and beyond and everyone in the sector knows the man behind it. After all those years I still do not believe I know the person. But I like and remain in awe of what I do know: the quiet, albeit enormous intellect, the personality that removes heat from any discussion that stands in the way of a result, the outcomes-focussed academic and, now former CEO of an enormous operation who managed to fit 48 hours into every 24. He is also a collector of fridge magnets – although I am told there is “fridge magnet criteria” in the Davis/Gardner household – they must be tacky! (Aren’t they all?)

And while he will hate me for writing it in public, I absolutely love the husband who will seek out his Vice Chancellor wife in a room for a quick smile, even a hand squeeze. It says a lot.

Vicki Thomson
Chief Executive
The Group of Eight

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faces detrimental to fight to ensure they are not.

From disadvantaged background, from all walks of life.

As Chair I am also proud also to have been shredding our undergraduates.