CEO’S MESSAGE

Welcome to the March edition of the Go8 Newsletter. We have had extremely positive feedback to last month’s re-designed issue, and I hope you continue to find the newsletter an informative and worthwhile read.

This month’s edition introduces the Go8’s newest Vice Chancellor, the University of NSW’s Ian Jacobs who joined us in February from the UK where he had been Vice President and Dean at the University of Manchester and Director of the Manchester Health Science Centre. It is always fascinating to learn what attracts people to join Australia’s higher education sector, the path they chose which ends up here with the Go8.

The newsletter also continues with some of the themes that proved so popular last month; “From the outside looking in” because seeing ourselves as others see us is invaluable, and the “Food for Thought” column which this month looks at some provocative comments by the BCA President Catherine Livingstone at the recent Universities Australia conference.

“I have now been Chief Executive for almost three months.”

I have now been Chief Executive for almost three months. Much of that time has been spent consumed by the Government’s higher education funding legislation. Its failure to pass the Senate for a second time on 17 March is regrettable but it now gives us an extra few months – until Parliament’s winter sitting – to prosecute workable solutions to our current broken funding structure.

The Go8 intends to be front and centre of the next round of political negotiations. In parallel with the funding package lobbying, I have very much enjoyed drilling down into the Go8 to more comprehensively answer some of my own questions about ‘who actually are we’?

We do already know, without any doubt, that we are Australia’s leading Universities, leading excellence, leading debate, but what sits behind that?

What sits behind it is a range of indisputable facts and figures that illustrate the enormous market strength of our members, and equally the enormous contribution they make every day to Australian society and to the economy.

Go8 members don’t always get the recognition they deserve for what they deliver. It gets lost. The facts and figures behind each member University’s contribution simply don’t get prominence. For example, can everyone reading this newsletter truly say they already knew that the eight universities which comprise the Go8 educate 25% of all higher education students in Australia?

In 2013, 350,000 students were enrolled at our eight Universities and 90,000 students graduated. Importantly, we know the Go8 teaches more than 40% of the nation’s engineering and science students, and more than 62% of all Australia’s medical, dentistry and veterinary students.

And of course we excel in research. In 2013 our research funding was $2.4 Billion, two thirds of all research funding to Australian universities. More than 30,000 research students were enrolled at a Go8 University, and over half of all research degree completions in Australia were from a Go8 university. In our eight universities, research students comprise one in 12 students compared with one in 30 for the rest of the sector.

As a group we directly support more than 51,000 jobs and the 2013 statistics show that we generated $10.5 Billion – 43% of the total sector, and we had overseas earnings that year of $1.9 Billion.

I am sharing those facts and figures with you because they bring into sharp focus why the Go8 has put so much effort into encouraging politicians to deal with the funding crisis affecting our sector. The percentage of students and the percentage of research the Go8 is responsible for, the value we push out into the economy, means that bad public policy or panicked band-aid political decisions which are not an effective long-term solution, negatively impact the Go8 more than other Universities.

The fact is, to negatively impact us means negatively impacting our students and our research. As the group of Australia’s leading universities, we do great things. We are committed to continuing that.

*The next newsletter will follow the Federal Budget.
“Quality students come from all walks of life. Ensuring every quality student and community support.”

As Federal Governments have a quality outcome from all walks of life, and success than others, with the long traditions between the two. Our group of Universities, proud also to have one of excellence – understanding of just how much the nation’s future.

Sadly there remains much to do to better understand our economy can fight for the right to a robust and severe renal failure. Australia’s economic level we wish to, and quality is finally decided much agreement.

As a group we celebrate excellence in the year which kill some some 600 to 1000 snakebites each year, and only a couple of deaths].

University of Adelaide researchers have been awarded $2.3 million by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to lead an international project aimed at saving some of the thousands of people in Myanmar (Burma) who die from snakebites each year.

Snakebites are a major public health issue in Myanmar, mainly among the rural poor. It is estimated there are some 14,000 snakebites there each year which kill some 2000 people, many as a result of acute renal failure caused by the bite.

[By comparison, while Australia is home to some of the world’s deadliest snakes, it reports some 600 to 1000 snakebites each year, and only a couple of deaths].

“Snakebites is one of the world’s most neglected tropical diseases,” says project leader Dr Chen Au Peh, Clinical Senior Lecturer at the University’s School of Medicine and a Consultant Renal Physician with the Royal Adelaide Hospital. “A severe bite from a Russell’s viper – one of the most common deadly snakes in Myanmar – requires antivenom within the first one to three hours, or the patient risks severe renal failure and death.

“Unfortunately for many snakebite victims, they are in remote regions with little access to antivenom, and often do not receive care within the required time. Australia, with its combination of quality healthcare systems and research, and an outstanding antivenom industry, is uniquely placed to play a global leadership role through this humanitarian work,” Dr Peh says.

The research team will work with industry and government, and the work will involve population studies to help better target the distribution of antivenom, as well as first-aid education and building capacity in clinical care at a local level. The three-year project, in partnership with leading Australian antivenom producer bioCSL will also improve the quality, quantity and availability of antivenom.

Team member Dr Afzal Mahmood of the University’s School of Population Health says the Myanmar government helps to subsidise the cost of antivenom treatment. “But there are additional costs for patients, such as transport and accommodation, and these can be upwards of US$700. This can be more than a year’s income. Even if the patient survives, the impact of snakebite on the farming poor is severe.

“The project will help address these costs, by ensuring higher quality antivenom is in the right places at the right time, and by improving clinical care, thereby reducing hospital stays,” Dr Mahmood says.

The project, funded under DFAT’s Government Partnerships for Development program builds on years of close association between University of Adelaide health researchers and the Myanmar health sector.

Collaborators on the project include bioCSL, South Australian-based Venom Supplies, four Myanmar government Ministries (Industry, Health, Forestry and Livestock), and researchers from the University of Sydney, University of Oxford, CSIRO, and the Royal Adelaide Hospital and Women’s and Children’s Hospital.


GO8’S NEWEST VICE CHANCELLOR, THE UNIVERSITY OF NSW’S PROFESSOR IAN JACOBS

Professor Ian Jacobs is the Go8’s newest university President and Vice Chancellor, arriving at UNSW (University of New South Wales), Australia just last month from the UK, where he had been Vice President and Dean at the University of Manchester.

He has a clear vision for the future of UNSW, and its trajectory in world rankings. He brings a passion for the higher education sector and principles and aims that he describes as fundamental – equity of student access, higher education shaping a nation’s social ethos, universities driving economic prosperity and taking responsibility to contribute globally to developing and emerging economies.

Professor Jacobs describes his new role as “the culmination of my previous experience in leadership in medicine, research and higher education. It feels as if my career has been building to this opportunity”. UNSW is a global top 100 University with some 52,000 students including 13,000 international students close to the centre of Sydney. ‘I had a ‘wow’ moment during the recruitment process when I stood at the top of the UNSW mall and saw a vista of what higher education can offer and achieve. The position was irresistible. This is a University with a wide breadth of excellence, filled with ambitious, committed staff, open to new ideas, with a youthful breaking the mould ethos, an approach I have always valued. So, it seemed to me that it was a fantastic fit.”

It was also the right job offer at the right time. Professor Jacobs and his wife Chris already had great memories of a previous visit to Sydney and Australia. “It was 1986, and we travelled through Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and across the Nullarbor, arriving in Fremantle on Christmas day, when the America’s Cup was taking place. It was a wonderful memory for us and we always said we would like to come back to live and work here.” Thirty years on and with their three children now in their 20s, it was the perfect time for the couple to return.

Professor Jacobs’ path to leading a Go8 university, follows a distinguished career and global reputation as a leading surgeon...
and researcher in women’s health and cancer. He obtained a BA in medicine and law at Cambridge and “always knew that my priority was to use my training to have a positive impact on people’s lives. I was inspired by a senior doctor during my time at medical school to choose women’s health as well as by the excitement of being directly involved as a student in delivering babies.”

It wasn’t long before Professor Jacobs felt that although clinical practice was incredibly satisfying – he obtained specialist accreditation as a surgical gynaecological oncologist at Bart’s and the Royal Marsden Hospital – it was “also frustratingly reactive to the constant flow of illness, rather than turning back the tide of patient suffering”. This led him into research in genetics, proteomics and clinical trials involving over 200,000 participants aimed at prevention and early detection of ovarian cancer.

“Research in turn, revealed to me the power of teams of talented, passionate and committed academics and clinicians working together. At University College London (where he created and directed the UCL Institute for Women’s Health and set up, directed the UCL Biomedical Research Centre and became Dean of Medicine) “I had the excitement of building cross disciplinary research teams involving hundreds of staff the results of which had a powerful impact.”

From building research teams, there was a natural progression into University leadership roles while he continued his work in women’s health. “What greater opportunity is there to deliver more for society and to promote new ideas, than in a leading University,” he says. “What Universities do is global, their research is relevant everywhere.”

Having decided that University leadership was his future career, Professor Jacobs became Vice President and Dean at the University of Manchester, a role which apart from a year at Duke University, was his first move away from London and Cambridge. There he combined a broad university role as Vice President, with ongoing roles in health as Dean of Medicine and Director of the Manchester Academic Health Science centre, a partnership linking the University with six healthcare organisations involving some 36,000 staff.

He had a rewarding time in Manchester but the inevitable next step was to explore opportunities for a Vice Chancellor role. It was at this time of considering future options, that he was approached about the position at UNSW. “We had always wanted to come back to Australia and everything I found out about UNSW convinced me that it was the right university for my skill set.”

Professor Jacobs intends to keep up his research activity in ovarian cancer prevention/screening and his role as Chair of the Uganda Women’s Health Initiative (UWHI), which he founded in 2005; UWHI involves a range of health projects, including a major cervical cancer screening initiative and the Professor visits the team of medical and nursing staff based in Uganda regularly. “It will be hard to fit this in with the role of University President but I hope to do so” and it fits with his passion for UNSW to make a contribution to countries with developing and emerging economies.

He aspires to “an open, approachable leadership style. At UNSW I want to inspire people, support new ideas and ensure that our staff and students can achieve their full potential.”
RESEARCH IMPACT
GETS DOWN AND DIRTY

Our public health and our economies rely on effective sewer infrastructure. This makes the design and management of the world’s vast urban sewer infrastructure one of society’s critical imperatives.

Now, through close collaboration with industry and other research partners in the world’s largest research project to focus on sewer corrosion and odour, the University of Queensland’s Advanced Water Management Centre is revolutionising that design and management.

The project is a joint initiative with the Federal Government, the Australian water industry and the nation’s leading water research organisations, and while its outcomes are still at an early stage, the project’s partners are already documenting economic benefits of several hundred million dollars.

The $21 million research project is the second largest project funded in the history of the Australian Research Council. It has also won a prestigious national award from the Business-Higher Education Round Table – the overarching award for ‘Outstanding Excellence in Collaboration’ and the ‘Best Research and Development Collaboration Award’. The aim of the project was to undertake the most comprehensive and in-depth study to date on understanding and abatement of corrosion and odour problems in sewers (the management of which, in Australia alone, is a multi-million dollar cost every year). Its scope was also to support the water industry in achieving efficient and cost-effective sewer management.

“It is fundamentally changing sewer corrosion and odour management practice in Australia…”

As one example of the project’s success, it has found that Australian sewers are being corroded partly because of an additive used in the drinking water treatment process. In some cases the lifespan of concrete pipes is being reduced by up to 90%; from an expected 50 – 100 years to as little as 10 years as they are converted from solid concrete into a soft crumbling powder.

Much of that corrosion could be reduced by a simple change to the treatment chemicals used in drinking water treatment. Such a change, from using aluminium sulfate to a non-sulfate coagulant would dramatically reduce concrete corrosion.

UQ project partners are the City of Gold Coast, South Australian Water Corp, South East Water Ltd, Sydney Water Corp, Water Research Australia Ltd, Melbourne Water Corp, Barwon Water Corp, Hunter Water Corp, Western Australia Water Corp, CH2MHILL, Veolia Water (Australia and New Zealand), The University of New South Wales, The University of Newcastle, The University of Sydney and Curtin University of Technology.
Business Council of Australia (BCA) President Catherine Livingstone had some forthright views to express at the recent Universities Australia conference. This is one such extract from her speech. And while the Government did, at the last minute, back down on NCRIS funding, Ms Livingstone’s comments on “how have we come to this” remain relevant.

“Shame on us.

“We have to see this as a failing on the part of the research sector, including universities, and on the part of business. Our collective lack of advocacy over time, and our inability to promote the importance of knowledge infrastructure and the role of these research facilities.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“In the context of physical infrastructure I do want to raise the issue of the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS). NCRIS is critical for enabling universities fulfil their role as part of the nation’s knowledge infrastructure. We have to ask ourselves the question about NCRIS: how have we come to this?”

“How have we come to a point where a Government feels it can use assets, publicly funded to the tune of over $2 billion, as a hostage in a political process? Where it is prepared to jeopardise over 1500 highly skilled research jobs and the continuing operation of 27 national facilities?”

UQ LIFTS SPORT TO A NEW LEVEL

The new facilities are expected to be completed in mid-2016

The University of Queensland is set to invest $25 million on sports facilities – two new elevated artificial playing fields that will have 500 additional casual carparking spaces underneath.

The higher level high-tech sports grounds will be built on top of an existing oval and softball diamond, and the ambitious building program includes sustainability initiatives such as rain water harvesting, electric car charging and secure storage for 200 bicycles.

High-quality synthetic turf will be laid over shock pads to reduce injury and ensure consistent ground quality. The greater durability also means the fields will be less susceptible to weather damage, increasing UQ’s capacity for more sports to be played throughout the year.

The new elevated facilities will not only benefit UQ’s many sporting clubs but also the local community which already enjoys access to an extensive range of recreation amenities at the UQ’s St Lucia campus.

Project design began in January with construction scheduled to start later this year. The new facilities are expected to be completed in mid-2016.

For more detail visit www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2015/03/new-carparks-sport-playing-fields
FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

The sector always looked like a hostage

Phillip Coorey
Chief Political Correspondent, Australian Financial Review

Minutes after surviving the motion to spill his leadership in February, Tony Abbott promised the mutineers things would change.

Unpopular policies which lacked sectoral support would be dumped. That was the death knell for the proposed Medicare co-payment because it was vehemently opposed by the Australian Medical Association.

Measures, however, which had support, would be persisted with. That meant the government would persevere with the higher education reforms which had already been rejected once by the Senate, but had the qualified support of Universities Australia and the Group of Eight.

From the outside, it appeared all along that the university sector was a reluctant participant in a process that was flawed politically. The government had no mandate for what most lay people thought was an attempt to Americanise our universities, reverting to the pre-Whitlam era where you either had to be rich or scholarship poor to go to university.

When announced, the measure was one of the most unpopular budget measures and that perception never changed.

It failed for several reasons, mostly political.

The case was never made and the rationale was poorly explained.

Vice Chancellors and ministers spoke of the need for our institutions to be internationally competitive against universities in Asia.

A statement utterly meaningless and devoid of relevance to the average middle-class voter worrying about their kid being saddled with a mortgage just to secure a bachelor degree that pays peanuts.

Moreover, linking deregulation to an increase in the HECS interest rate and the 20 per cent funding cut was an error. Blatant, unmandated budget savings masquerading as reform that would exacerbate the scale and impact of fee increases under deregulation.

In the mind of voters, it was deemed as unfair as charging poor people $7 to see a doctor and reducing the indexation rate of pensions. For the Opposition, a scare campaign handed to it on a plate.

The sector, which appeared to really only support deregulation, always looked like a hostage which felt the need to side with the government and negotiate a way through on the whole package.

Belinda Robinson summed it up well recently by likening the situation to that of the Utah canyoner Aron Ralston who was forced to cut off his own arm to survive.

The sector should be buoyed that the government, in its inal bid to pass the measures, split the bills to separate deregulation from the funding cut.

It failed by just three votes but the case for change has taken hold. Nick Xenophon just wants a proper model worked out. Ricky Muir will change his mind if the government receives a mandate,

Dio Wang appears malleable. Even Labor is promising an alternative.

The sector should put its foot down and, like the doctors, argue for what it wants, not anything else. Allowing itself to be used for a broader political objective has handed it and the government a whole lot of nothing.

Had the government been pressured to split the bills from the outset, or even after the first rejection, one feels there may have been a different outcome to that of March 17.

With both sides of politics now speaking passionately about the importance of innovation to the nation’s long-term productivity, and both agreeing the funding model for higher education needs change, the sector has never has a stronger argument for what it deems necessary to survive and prosper.

With all limbs intact.

Vice Chancellors and ministers spoke of the need for our institutions to be internationally competitive against universities in Asia.
Professor Glyn Davis
VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

"The question whether markets work in higher education has been much debated and remains an arcane and technical subject. It is worth noting that two out of three parts of the higher education sector are already deregulated; that is, the graduate and international markets. And in neither international nor graduate education, which have been operating for 25 years, do you see the extraordinary price increases people confidently assert will happen in the undergraduate market if deregulated. Deregulation seems an approach that works in practice, but apparently not in theory."

Professor Warren Bebbington
VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

"I think the concept of what a university is has been shredding for some time. We’re beyond making efficiency cuts. From here on in, the question is just how inadequate the income is going to be."

Professor Peter Høj
VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

"...as wise heads in both industry and research have said, we need to make an impenetrably strong case that the nation needs research. More clearly than ever, we must show how high-priority research saves and improves lives, creates jobs, builds productivity and offers solutions to urgent environmental problems. The NCRIS near-miss has done at least two things: it has served as a wake-up call and it has highlighted that many people in industry and the non-research community really do ‘get it’. Let’s seize this opportunity to re-engage with the community, to interlock with industry, and to leave no doubt that a vibrant, secure research culture makes Australia smart and prosperous."

Professor Michael Spence
VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

"Australia has two resources – things in the ground and clever people. We do research really well; the future is about innovation, and investment in core facilities is absolutely crucial to the nation’s future."

Professor Paul Johnson
VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

"The University of Western Australia has been running the Perth International Arts Festival for 63 years and we are proud to have created the oldest arts festival in the southern hemisphere. All Universities extend beyond teaching and research to community engagement. For UWA an important part of this engagement with our community is delivering the arts and culture brought by one of the largest festivals in the world. In valuing the university’s contribution we cannot stop what we do in the classroom or laboratory but need to count and value what we do on the streets, campus, and virtually with our broad community."