"Quality students come from all walks of life. Ensuring every quality student can have a quality outcome at the University of their choice requires realistic political policies, and community support."

The Go8 enters 2015 dealing with recurring themes to the fore – quality, funding, results, values, equity, choice – each one reliant on others to achieve.

To our group of Universities, those themes go to the heart of who we are and what we do.

Our standards, of teaching and research, are absolute.

As our new CEO Vicki Thomson says, 2015 is the year we will have to fight to ensure they are protected into the future, because everyone living in Australia benefits if they can be, and faces detrimental consequences if they are not.

I see being Chair of the Go8 as an enormous privilege, never more so than at a time when our future ability to maintain quality, funding, results, values, equity and choice are at risk from potentially poor political decisions related to funding.

In 2013, the Go8 provided Australia with 89,950 graduates. They benefited from much lower student staff ratios than at other Australian Universities, and through our position as the most research-intensive group of Australian Universities they had access to unique research-based learning. That quality experience which delivers Australia’s economy a quality graduate outcome cannot be allowed to be compromised.

As Chair I am also vehement that the Go8 must be able to continue to provide our undergraduates from disadvantaged backgrounds with the support and education that currently delivers them better outcomes in terms of retention and success than at other Australian Universities.

Quality students come from all walks of life. Ensuring every quality student can have a quality outcome at the University of their choice requires realistic political policies, and community support.

Yet teaching is only one component of our contribution. In 2013 the Go8 received research income of $2.4 billion. Its global value in terms of impact is immeasurable. Our pride that this has come from dedication to quality research at a group of Australian Universities is immense.

As a group of Universities we are facing an uncertain funding future at this point, but what the Go8 is certain of is that everything we ask of Canberra’s politicians, and every decision we make relating to fees and student support mechanisms, concentrates solely on being able to continue delivering the highest quality teaching and research in Australia.
Welcome to the first Go8 newsletter of 2015, and also my first newsletter since joining the Go8 as CEO last month.

As Federal Parliament resumes for its first session of the year, the final makeup of its Higher Education reform agenda, currently stalled in the Senate, will define the future of every Australian University for at least two generations.

2015 is therefore a pivotal and extremely challenging year for our sector, and for Australia’s economic future; for without a robust and quality higher education sector, one of excellence in both graduates and research, our economy can only wither.

Sadly there remains too little community – and dare I say political – understanding of just how much the strength or otherwise of our sector affects a nation’s future.

The Universities which make up the Go8, in particular, have much at stake in the current funding debate as we seek a funding formula and methodology that can enable us to deliver at the demanding level we wish to, and as Australia’s future requires us to.

As a group we celebrate excellence and are proud to be known as Australia’s group of elite Universities. However we must illustrate more clearly to politicians and to the taxpayers who part-fund us, that while we may be elite we are not elitist – and there is a world of difference between the two.

Equally while we are proud also to have the long traditions of being Australia’s first and still premier group of Universities, we must illustrate more clearly that we do not allow those traditions to stop us embracing change. Traditions deliver a valued and valuable foundation, but they alone can never deliver a viable future.

We also all love to hear that Go8 Universities have educated every Nobel Prize winner educated in an Australian University – but our quest is to be sure we can continue to do so.

During the next year, it will be how much the Go8 can convince the politicians and taxpayers that our sights are set firmly on a future for ourselves that can deliver an elite, value for money, education for any student with the capability of graduating, that will assist us make our case for a funding model that can work for us.

As Australia’s most research-intensive group of Universities we must ensure the funding model that is finally decided upon takes this level of research into consideration. Research equals the future. We owe it to ourselves and to the Australian community to better “sell” the positive effects of our research and its impact on the lives of every Australian, every day. Its global impact also must be better understood.

For a nation of just 23.7 million our research punches well above our weight –

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For a nation of just 23.7 million our research punches well above our weight! So in a year of much to be proud of, and much to do to better share our values and determination, bluntly, we have a fight ahead of us.

While there is much agreement the current higher education funding model is broken – largely as a result of the uncapping of student places without the funding to pay for the additional numbers – there is no political consensus on how to repair it.

The Go8 will be fighting for the right to deliver quality – of teaching and of research. We owe that to the community, as do our politicians.

I will keep you informed each month of what 2015 brings for the Go8.
The first in a series of occasional columns that, as its name suggests, gives us all much food for thought!

Below is an extract of an article published in "The Conversation" by University of Melbourne Vice Chancellor Professor Glyn Davis. It is very relevant during the current higher education funding debate. "There is no public university in Australia."

"The idea of a public university is worth defending. The term suggests commitment to merit-based and equitable entry. A public university means a curriculum that emphasises intellectual inquiry, regardless of the course chosen. It indicates staff, facilities and services to support student learning, and campus life to encourage exploration and growth. A public university is home to academic freedom in thought, teaching and research, with governance that ensures academic oversight of academic matters.

Australian public universities meet these tests. What they lack is public funding.

A generation ago public universities received almost all their income from Canberra. This changed in 1989. Within a decade public universities were raising most of their income. Today direct Commonwealth recurrent funds cover just 23% of the running costs of the University of Melbourne.

For more: http://theconversation.com/glyn-davis-why-i-support-the-deregulation-of-higher-education-36766

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The POWER OF SPORT

Showing yet again how Go8 Universities embrace every aspect of Australian life, the Melbourne Football Club has signed an MOU with the University of Melbourne that will see Australian Rules become more accessible to that University’s 16,000 strong international student population, and the partnership will also extend into other areas including research.

With sport such an integral part of University life, and this is Melbourne home of the AFL!) and there being a much higher focus by AFL clubs on their players securing an excellent higher education, the formalising of such a mutually beneficial agreement between two of Melbourne’s oldest and most iconic institutions makes perfect sense.


Seated (L-R): Tom McDonald and Jay Kennedy-Harris, both members of the University of Melbourne chapter of the ACYA (Australia-China Youth Association), with James Campbell. Back: Tim Blanch. Image by: Matthew Goodrope.
FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Is reform one for the too-hard basket?

There were high hopes before Christmas that Education Minister Chris Pyne was within striking distance of a deal.

That was before Queensland Senator Glenn Lazarus threw a hissy fit after being contacted on his mobile phone by Pyne.

Have you ever met a crossbench senator who complained about getting personal calls from a minister to discuss major policy reform?

No, I haven’t either but the long-running joke that the current Senate looks like the bar scene from Star Wars is not an idea that has emerged from a vacuum.

Not all of the PUPs are barking populism. It’s an open secret in Canberra that PUP senator Dio Wang is supportive of deregulation.

Smart and sympathetic to universities plight, Wang had fought a lonely battle first against the outspoken Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie.

When Lambie exited the PUP team after a blow up with Palmer, there were high hopes that her departure would actually make it more likely rather than less that Wang could win the argument within PUP.

It didn’t happen.

Many within the Coalition also hoped that Palmer might huff and puff before the Queensland election before cutting a deal.

But that hope was all but extinguished in January to express his disapproval for the legislation.

“You can polish a turd for as long as you want, it’s always going to be a turd,” said Senator Lazarus.

Despite nearly universal support among vice chancellors for university deregulation, the cross bench isn’t budging.

Worse, SA Senator Bob Day and Liberal Democrat David Leyonhjelm have threatened to withdraw support for the bill if the government junks deregulation.

Now, there are early signs that universal support is starting to fracture.

From the outside looking in academics appear to want politicians to do the heavy lifting.

The debate over deregulation appears to be a clubby affair, with vice chancellors talking to politicians and vice versa.

But where are the vice chancellors out explaining to voters, and in turn the cross bench, that reform is vital? What will be impact of failure to act now for the next generation of students?

Universities and vice chancellors might know the arguments well but the public does not.

Labor’s killer campaign over the risk of $100,000 degrees has proved highly successful – despite the fact that they already exist.

Don’t expect that Pyne’s decision to dump a higher interest rate on HECS debts will stop Labor from sticking to a proven formula.

But if universities are not prepared to put more skin in the game you can’t blame the Abbott Government for hanging up their fighting gloves.

“We will not buy fights with the Senate that we can’t win, unless we are absolutely determined that they are the fights that we really, really do need to have,” Mr Abbott said after surviving a leadership spill 61:39.

The Abbott Government remains committed to university deregulation but they are not going to keep banging their head against Glenn “The Brick” Lazarus’ wall indefinitely.

Samantha Maiden is National Political Editor, The Sunday Telegraph and a graduate of the University of Adelaide.
The University of Western Australia’s childcare facility Unicare has achieved recognition as a Centre of Excellence, with much thanks to Macca the big pig.

Kids at the University’s innovative Unicare Early Childhood Centre, who share their playground with the large docile pet pig, experience what it’s like caring for a farm animal by feeding, cleaning and walking him. This is only one of the many innovative programs within the centre which is also used for teaching new early childhood educators.

When Macca’s not uploading selfies to his very own Facebook page, you can often see Macca roaming around campus with several kids in tow.

Macca is toilet trained and has exemplary hygiene – washing his snout in one bucket, drinking from another and bathing in a third small trough.

Unicare is a community based not-for-profit facility, and thanks to innovations like Macca, the Centre has just received the excellent rating after an assessment by the Australian Children Education and Care Quality Authority.

VC VIEWS

University of Melbourne Vice Chancellor Prof. Glyn Davis

Fee deregulation is to fund a quality education for students

“Current funding rates mean the tertiary education offered to Australians at times falls short of global practice. In the absence of public appetite to invest in public education, a measure of fee deregulation is the only way left to fund education policy to a reasonable standard.”

University of Queensland Vice Chancellor Prof. Peter Høj

No deregulation will obstruct opportunity for deserving students

“Our University has already grown enormously and should in my view not get bigger. The worst case scenario would therefore be, that deserving Australian students are denied places because the University by necessity must attract more full-fee paying international students instead. The risk is therefore that Australian students who are prepared to pay for a UQ education effectively are barred by legislation from doing so. Under that scenario, legislation that fails to reflect differences in quality and cost is legislation that could be said to obstruct opportunity”.

University of Adelaide Vice Chancellor Prof. Warren Bebbington

The current system is unfair to students

“There has been much talk of unfairness in the reform proposals. Yet no-one should think that the current system is fair; some students pay as much as 400% of the cost of their education, others as little as 8%.”

University of Western Australia Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Johnson

Political debate is avoiding reality

“I have not heard anyone on the Government side or from the Opposition coming out saying ‘this is the tax increases we are prepared to put to the Australian people in order to fund the higher-education sector’. If the Senate turns round and says there is no fee flexibility, the only thing we can do is cut, and every University will retreat to its core activities”.

University of Melbourne

费德里克·克里斯托弗·戴维斯

学费自由化旨在资助优质教育

“当前的资助率意味着澳大利亚的高等教育有时无法达到全球实践的标准。在缺乏公众意愿投资公立教育的情况下，学费自由化是唯一可行的方法来资助教育政策达到合理标准。”

昆士兰大学

彼得·霍伊教授

不自由化将阻碍有资格学生的机遇

“我们的大学已经大幅增长，我认为不应该变大。最坏的情况是，澳大利亚学生可能因大学的必要性而被迫吸引更多的全费国际学生。风险是，法律未能反映质量差异和成本差异，这可能阻碍机会。”

阿德莱德大学

保罗·约翰逊教授

政治辩论正在回避现实

“我未听到任何政府方面或反对派人士表示‘这是我们愿意向澳大利亚人民征税以资助高等教育部门的税收’。如果参议院转而说‘没有学费灵活性’，唯一的事情就是削减，每一所大学将退回到其核心活动。”