

A/Prof Gerd Schröder-Turk FAPS, PhD(ANU), Dr rer nat habil(FAU)

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to the
Senate Education and Employment Committees
c/o Committee Secretary Mr Alan Raine
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
- via committee website -

10 Sept 2020

Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020

Dear Mr Raine, Dear Committee Members,

Please see attached a submission to committee inquiry into the above mentioned Bill.

The submission has no confidential parts.

For full disclosure: I hold an office as the member of the Murdoch University Senate elected by and from the academic staff and I also hold the office of special project officer on the National Executive of the Australian Institute of Physics.

This submission is made in my private capacity and represents my personal views. I wish to be clear that I am not implying that the views I express are the views of my employer (Murdoch University), or of its Senate or of any other organisation I belong to.

I thank the committee for considering my submission.

Kind regards,

Gerd Schröder-Turk

A/Prof Gerd Schröder-Turk FAPS PhD(ANU) Dr habil(FAU)

Risk and consequences of separation of teaching and research

Dear Members of the Senate Education and Employment Committee,

I wish to draw the committee's attention to one particular aspect of the Bill, namely the risk that the proposed bill will lead to a further separation of research and teaching in Australia's universities. Such a separation is in my opinion detrimental to both the quality of the teaching and the quality (and independence) of the research that Australia's public universities can deliver to the Australian public. Such a separation of teaching and research is likely to be contrary, at least in spirit, to the Australian Research Council Guidelines, the TEQSA guidelines and to the recent Coaldrake Review. This aspect relates closely to the discussion whether the legislator wishes to incentivise the traditional mixed teaching/research employment model as the principal form of academic employment.

How does the proposed bill further a separation of teaching and research?

The Bill drives a further separation of teaching and research through the funding mechanism it proposes.

The premise of the Bill is that the sum of student contributions (HECS) and government contributions (CGS) should be adjusted to the cost of delivery of courses as estimated by a Deloitte Access Economics study. In terms of staff cost, it appears that this cost of delivery includes the workload for teaching, but not the research workload for the academics.

As the average over all disciplines, this adjustment corresponds to a major reduction in government contributions, estimated to be 1.3 Billion dollars by Andrew Norton.¹

Assume a course is taught by teaching and research academics, all of whom have a 60% teaching workload and 40% research workload. In terms of the course delivery cost, the Deloitte study only seems to include the 60% teaching component of the staffing cost.

Irrespective of whether this adjustment and reduction is reasonable, it represents a substantial change to the current funding model. Under the current scheme the universities use these excess funds to cover, at least in parts, the staffing costs of teaching/research academics beyond their teaching workload components.

Even if a 'research funding scheme' is put in place to provide universities with additional research funding to compensate for the removal of these excess funds, the separation of funding into 'teaching costs' and 'research costs' leads to a greater separation of teaching and research. For example, universities are increasingly placing research into institutes with little interaction with students, particularly undergraduate students.

What is the current position of government and regulators in relation to whether or not teaching and research should be conjoint or separate in universities?

The Committee should address this question by consideration of, at least, the following regulations, guidelines or reports:

1. **Higher Education Standards (HES) framework developed by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.**¹: The TEQSA standards provide for a number of threshold standards that relate to the commitment of providers to scholarship and research, and related staffing issues. In particular Section 3.2 and 4.2 and parts B1.1 and B1.2 mandate a clear commitment to extended scholarship or research components of staff. This includes in particular TEQSA Standard B.1.1.4 which reads *“The higher education provider’s academic staff are active in scholarship that informs their teaching, and are active in research when engaged in research student supervision.”*
2. **NHMRC and ARC ‘Responsible Conduct of Research 2018’**² (see guidance note³): *These guidelines provide particular stipulations around the research workload time for academics who are involved in Higher Degree Student (HDR) supervisions.* Importantly, the expectation of the ARC and NHMRC is that not only those funded through these two agencies need to comply with the code, but rather that the code *“outlines the expectations for the conduct of research in Australia or research conducted under the auspices of Australian institutions”*
3. **The 2019 Coaldrake “Review of the Higher Education Provider Category Standards”** (whose recommendations were accepted by the Government): One important aspect of the report is the question of what are the defining features of a university as opposed to other higher education providers, and the report identifies research activity to be one such defining feature. The review says *“Along with teaching, the undertaking of research is, and should remain, a defining feature of what it means to be a university in Australia; a threshold benchmark of quality and quantity of research should be included in the Higher Education Provider Category Standards.”* However, the Coaldrake report makes an even stronger statement that can be interpreted as an expectation that teaching and research need to be closely intertwined within the university (and conducted by the same group of staff), rather than separated into largely research-only and other largely teaching-only entities.

“the undertaking of research is, and should remain, a defining feature of what it means to be a university in Australia”

(2019 Coaldrake Review)

What is the current position of the academic community and accrediting bodies in relation to whether or not teaching and research should be conjoint or separate in universities?

I believe that there is a widespread consensus amongst the academic community that teaching and research need to be conjoint activities in universities.

1 The *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* was signed into legislation on 7 October 2015, and is accessible here: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2015L01639>

2 Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. (2018)

3 Supervision: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra (2019)

The committee should actively seek an understanding of the position of accrediting bodies and representative bodies of the academic community by consulting with them. In particular, the bodies that should be consulted are

1. The accrediting bodies of all Australian University degrees (such as Australian Psychology Accreditation Council, Engineers Australia, Royal Australian Chemical Institute, etc)
2. The professional associations in Australia (Australian Mathematical Society⁴, Australian Political Studies Association, The Astronomical Society of Australia)
3. The learned academies including the Australian Academy of Sciences, the Academy of the Social Science in Australia; Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering
4. The Association of Australian University Professors (AAUP) as a representative of the most senior academics in Australian Universities.

An indication of the likely finding of such a consultation could be given by the following statements of relevant associations and bodies:

1. The *Magna Charta Universitatum* (Great Charter of Universities) has been signed, as of 2018, by 889 universities from 88 countries, according to Wikipedia⁵ It has been signed by numerous Australian Universities, including the University of Western Australia, and Latrobe University as an IRU university⁶. As clause 2, it states “*Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge*”.
2. The Association of Australian University Professors approved, by its council, a “Statement on Academic Freedom & The Pillars of a University (What a University should be)”⁷. This statement includes, as clause 3 of the section “The Pillars of a University”, the clause “*The inherent relationship between teaching and research- based inquiry in our universities needs to be nurtured, respected and celebrated.*”
3. *Engineers Australia*, in their Accreditation Standard Higher Education, AMS-STD-10, OE3(c) (iv)) require, for accreditation of engineering degrees, a “*dynamic, cooperative learning community [with] interlinked research and teaching programs*”

“The inherent relationship between teaching and research- based inquiry in our universities needs to be nurtured, respected and celebrated.”

(Austral Assoc of University Professors)

4 For full disclosure, I declare my membership of the Australian Mathematical Society and of the Australian Institute of Physics and of the National Executive of the Australian Institute of Physics.

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Charta_Universitatum

6 As per <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/signatory-universities/signatory-universities#--> the Australian signatories are: Adelaide U, Deakin U, Flinders U, Latrobe U, U Melbourne, U Tasmania, U Technology Sydney, U Sydney and U Western Australia.

7 <http://www.professors.org/2020/03/21/statement-on-academic-freedom-the-pillars-of-a-university-what-a-university-should-be/>

Can the government trust the universities to maintain the close connection between teaching and research even when the funding for research and teaching is further separated through this legislation?

I do not believe that the government can rely on the universities, both their managements and their governing bodies, to maintain the close connection between teaching and research.

I would argue that there is already a tendency to use an increasing number of teaching-only or teaching-focused staff to deliver university courses and units. Relevant staff statistics are available through Annual Reports of the public universities, and presumably also through Universities Australia.

Data for my state of residence (Western Australia), extracted from Annual Reports of its four public universities, are indicative of the trend towards delivering university education increasingly through academic staff who have no substantial research workload allowance, that is, through staff who predominantly teach.

	Percentage of staff in research and teaching roles (as opposed to research only and as opposed to teaching only) a fraction of all academic staff (All data based on FTE).			
	Curtin ⁸	Edith Cowan ⁹	Murdoch ¹⁰	UWA ¹¹
2015	33.9%	62.0%	59.0%	53.1%
2019	32.1%	32.1%	38.5%	55.6%

If the government wishes to maintain the nexus between teaching and research, I consider that it needs to incentivise universities’ leaderships and managements to maintain the traditional research/teaching academic role as the principal form of academic employment. The proposed bill, which has the effect of a further separation of teaching funding from research funding, does not provide such an incentive.

The publicly available minutes of the governing boards of the WA universities do not suggest that all WA university governing boards (Senates) have regular substantial discussions around the issue of the Coaldrake Review and or around the issue of what form of academic employment is best suited to achieve the best academic outcome for the public institutions, both in terms of research and teaching. I note the now low representation of academic staff on the governing boards. I also note the low number of external board members with extensive higher-education expertise on some of these governing boards^{12 13}; I do believe that legislation is needed to guide the governing boards if the government wishes for a close overlap of teaching and research, and teaching staff and research staff, at our public universities.

8 See Curtin University Annual Report 2019 page 60. Data based on FTE.
 9 See ECU Annual Report 2015, p 121, and ECU Annual Report 2019, p 31. Data based on FTE.
 10 See Murdoch Annual Report 2019, p 20. Data based on FTE.
 11 See UWA Annual Report 2019, p54. Data based on FTE.
 12 See Extract from Hansard, WA Legislative Council meeting Thursday 13 October 2016, p7012b-7035a and in particular the contributions from the Honorable Sue Ellery.
 13 The Conversation, “Governing universities: tertiary experience no longer required”, 4 Sept 2020 (<https://theconversation.com/governing-universities-tertiary-experience-no-longer-required-145439>)

What are the benefits of the conjoint nature of teaching and research for the education we deliver?

I have no doubt that there are overwhelming benefits to our education if it is carried out in close proximity to our research activities, and by the staff involved closely with research. There has been significant discussion around this issue, and the Coaldrake Review and the TEQSA Standards recognise the significant benefits of that conjoint nature. I believe that there is widespread consensus amongst the academic community that teaching and research should not be separated in universities.

What are the benefits of the conjoint nature of teaching and research for the research conducted at public universities?

A core benefit is to lift research quality by enhancing independence of those who conduct research, including issues of academic freedom and freedom of speech.

The validity of research relies on the independence of the researcher who carries out the research. A researcher whose livelihood or grant success depends on the success of his or her research has a potential conflict of interest to ‘talk up’ his or her research outcomes; a researcher whose funding depends on the outcome of a research project or who does not feel free to communicate his or her results, is not independent (I note the recent survey around environmental scientists, discussed in a recent *The Conversation* article¹⁴). Industry-funded research is inherently at risk of independence of the research carried out from the entity funding it, especially in relation to controversial topics. In a more subtle way, researchers whose continued employment depends on their research success (e.g. through grant income) can find it difficult to move to new fields where it becomes difficult to establish a name. The reality is that, probably like everywhere, academic research is cluttered with situations where independence becomes compromised in one way or another.

A key challenge for the universities and for the government who legislates the universities is to create an environment of greatest independence for its researchers. I consider that the perhaps greatest form of independence results from a financial independence of the researchers from their research success and their research outcomes. I consider that the traditional model of mixed teaching/research employment as the principal form of academic employment achieves this goal well. The researcher’s key form of independence – that is through secure and long-term employment – is supported by two pillars, namely teaching and research, rather than just one. Academic independence and academic freedom is then best supported.

Concluding thoughts

I believe that the maintenance of teaching/research jobs as the principal form of academic employment is crucial for the ongoing success of Australian Universities.¹⁵ This employment form ensures the teaching/research nexus, leading to excellent education outcomes and independent research.

14 <https://theconversation.com/research-reveals-shocking-detail-on-how-australias-environmental-scientists-are-being-silenced-140026>

15 To avoid any confusion: I wish to express my greatest respect and acknowledgment for those of my colleagues who choose to focus their energy and passion on teaching and delivery of education, and for the excellent work that my teaching-focused colleagues across the country perform.

I encourage the Committee to assess carefully the implications of the proposed Bill with respect to these matters.

My personal opinion is that the separation of teaching and research funding that results from this Bill in its current form is not in the interest of the Australian public, as it leads to detrimental outcomes for Australia's universities.

Thank you for considering my comments in the deliberations of the Committee. I would happily make myself available to provide further information if required or useful.

Best wishes

A/Prof Gerd E Schröder-Turk

10 Sept 2020