

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Chapter 1

### Recommendation One

The Committee recommends that the Government end the funding crisis in higher education by adopting designated Commonwealth programs involving significant expansion in public investment in the higher education system over a ten year period.

## Chapter 2

### Recommendation Two

The Committee recommends that the Government promote national debate on the issues addressed in this report, and that a national summit, representative of cross sectoral interests, be convened to build consensus around the following principles:

- a clear assessment of the nation's higher education needs both in the immediate and longer-term;
- a clear vision for the role of public universities in meeting those needs, including national social development and local or regional development needs. This vision must clearly articulate:
  - universities' commitment to academic freedom and intellectual inquiry and to promotion of the public good;
  - public universities' responsibility for meeting national needs for education and research and the relative importance of these and commercial, including international education, activities;
  - the respective roles of public universities and private providers and VET institutions and providers in meeting needs for further education;
- agreed principles for universities' commercial activities, which reflect universities' status as public institutions accountable to both state and Commonwealth governments; and
- provision of public investment levels consistent with the agreed principles.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Recommendation Three**

The Committee recommends that the Government review differential HECS charge levels and lower HECS thresholds. In the first instance attention needs to be paid to the removal of disincentives to mature age access, particularly in such areas as nursing.

### **Recommendation Four**

The Committee also recommends that the Government phase out domestic students' access to undergraduate places in HEFA funded courses on a fee-paying basis. This policy is fundamentally inequitable and has no place in an Australian higher education policy based on the principles of equity and merit.

### **Recommendation Five**

The Committee recommends that as a matter of urgency the Government undertake a review of the most appropriate indexation arrangements for university operating grants.

### **Recommendation Six**

The Committee recommends that the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) commission a review of the costs of providing higher education for international students, with a view to ensuring that charges accurately reflect all direct and indirect costs. The review should include an assessment of any additional support requirements for international students.

### **Recommendation Seven**

The Committee recommends that as a matter of urgency the Government undertake a review of universities' current practice concerning ancillary fees and charges, including for student accommodation.

### **Recommendation Eight**

The Committee recommends that the Government alters current funding models and identify alternate models that would better reflect the specific needs of regional and new universities, and those serving large populations of disadvantaged students, as well as ensuring that the provision of places is in line with national needs.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Recommendation Nine**

The Committee recommends that a formal inquiry be conducted into the auditing requirements of universities, covering both the scope of DETYA guidelines and the varying requirements of state foundation and audit acts.

### **Recommendation Ten**

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA examine the current balance between Commonwealth and state responsibilities for higher education and consider the possible transfer of statutory powers for universities to the Commonwealth.

### **Recommendation Eleven**

The Committee also recommends the appointment of Commonwealth parliamentary representatives, or parliamentary nominees, to governing bodies of universities in receipt of Commonwealth monies.

### **Recommendation Twelve**

The Committee recommends that national Universities Ombudsman be appointed, funded by the Commonwealth, after consultation with the states and national representative bodies on higher education, including staff and students, and that such an office include the power to investigate ancillary fees and charges and to conciliate complaints. Students enrolled in Australian programs off-shore should have equal rights of access to the Ombudsman.

### **Recommendation Thirteen**

The Committee recommends that a cross-sectoral advisory body be established to provide independent advice to government, and that this body include respected and experienced individuals reflecting community interests as well as those of higher education.

Issues to be referred to such a body could include:

- a review of the adequacy of student income support measures, particularly the impact of changes to the age of independence requirements for student income support, especially in relation to participation rates in higher education;
- a review of the cost for rural and regional families and students of participating in higher education;
- the effects of convergence between the higher education and VET sectors; and

- examination of the applicability of the Research Assessment Exercise developed in Britain as a basis for distributing public research funds on the basis of quality.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Recommendation Fourteen**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA):

- address the issue of course assessment to ensure the integrity of qualifications granted by Australian universities; and
- investigate the effectiveness and application of quality assurance regarding assessment procedures.

### **Recommendation Fifteen**

The Committee also recommends that universities collectively consider:

- the more widespread use of external examiners: and,
- a greater use of moderation exercises across a number of universities.

### **Recommendation Sixteen**

The Committee recommends that the Government ensure a high priority be given to funding to public universities to support on-line learning including:

- free bridging or pathway programs to university study to encourage as many people as possible to improve their education, with a view to providing an additional 100,000 places;
- an expansion in on-line courses for undergraduate students;
- increased development of on-line education materials; and
- an increase in the capacity of all universities to offer on-line courses to overseas students.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Recommendation Seventeen**

The Committee recommends that the Government contribute to the funding of the collaborative development of National Site Licence agreements with publishers to enable university libraries to gain greater access to the widest possible range of on-line serials and other research materials.

### **Recommendation Eighteen**

The Committee recommends that the Government review the balance between the level of block funding provided under the Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) and that provided under competitive grants.

### **Recommendation Nineteen**

The Committee recommends that the Government consider removing the following two items as components of research income for the purposes of the IGS:

- (a) universities' own investment of funds (from endowment income etc) on research; and
- (b) income from consultancies that do not involve the development of new knowledge.

### **Recommendation Twenty**

The Committee recommends that Australian Research Council grants schemes be reviewed to ensure they reflect:

- adequate support for both basic and applied research and for the humanities and social sciences;
- support for emerging disciplines and early career researchers; and
- implementation of a range of strategies to assist new universities to develop their research and training capacity.

### **Recommendation Twenty-One**

The Committee recommends that the Government double the number of research fellowships available to Australian researchers. Such fellowships should assist both early and mid career researchers, as well as providing a new range of assistance to outstanding researchers through a new program of elite fellowships designed to retain our brightest minds in Australian universities.

### **Recommendation Twenty-Two**

The Committee recommends an increase in the level of support provided under the Research Infrastructure Block Grants Scheme (RIBG). To limit the immediate budgetary impact, this could be done on a phased basis, until the ratio reaches the level of 45c expenditure on infrastructure for every dollar of competitive grant income.

**Recommendation Twenty-Three**

The Committee recommends that DETYA review the Research Training Scheme (RTS) criteria so that research in emerging disciplines can be supported as areas where major contributions to innovation can be made.

**Recommendation Twenty-Four**

The Committee recommends that the Government upgrade the Science, Engineering and Innovation Council into a Council with responsibility of providing expert advice across the widest range of disciplines, including sciences, engineering, the humanities and social sciences.

**Recommendation Twenty-Five**

The Committee recommends that the Office of the Chief Scientist be made a full time position.

**Recommendation Twenty-Six**

The Committee recommends an expansion of the Cooperative Research Centres Program to ensure the incorporation of the humanities, social sciences and creative arts.

**Chapter 7****Recommendation Twenty-Seven**

The Committee recommends that the MCEETYA should formally commission a review addressing the commercial accountability framework as it applies to universities as well as broader public policy issues including the need for a ‘public interest’ test for commercial operations. Such a review should include consideration of universities’ legal liabilities for commercial operations and associated risks.

**Recommendation Twenty-Eight**

The Committee recommends that proposals for commercial investments or undertakings should be subject to full disclosure and scrutiny by councils and associated committees and should conform to all relevant legislation and recognised standards of public disclosure.

**Recommendation Twenty-Nine**

The Committee recommends that the Government address the current ambiguity governing the taxation status of universities’ commercial arms and their compliance with the principles of competitive neutrality.

If there are genuine public interest reasons for competitive neutrality principles to be over-ridden, these should be stated explicitly and appropriate legislative steps taken to protect the legal position of universities.

**Recommendation Thirty**

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA identify the key elements that should be included in universities' policies and practices concerning academic consultancies and that the AUQA be required to examine these policies and practices as part of its audit of educational institutions.

**Recommendation Thirty-One**

The Committee recommends that the Government, in consultation with MCEETYA, develop a broad policy framework for commercialisation of research to ensure that public interest and probity considerations are given due weight in universities' individual policies and that there is due diligence and full scrutiny by university governing bodies of all proposals for commercialisation of research.

**Recommendation Thirty-Two**

The Committee recommends that the Government, as part of its development of commercialisation policy, consider establishment of an Innovation Grants Program from within existing resources to provide seed funding to university owned (or majority-owned) companies to address the current lack of start up capital.

**Recommendation Thirty-Three**

The Committee recommends that the states and Commonwealth (through MCEETYA) consider the benefits inherent in the Commonwealth, with its major funding responsibility and greater resource base, assuming responsibility for monitoring universities' financial operations, including the operations of commercial arms.

**Chapter 8****Recommendation Thirty-Four**

The Committee recommends that the Government examine new ways of encouraging the participation in higher education of educationally disadvantaged Australians, particularly indigenous students.

**Chapter 9****Recommendation Thirty-Five**

The Committee calls on the Government acknowledge that Australia is facing a loss of experienced academics as a result of comparatively poor salary rates in Australia and recommends that the Government increase public investment in higher education to enable an increase in salary levels.

### **Recommendation Thirty-Six**

The Committee recommends that DETYA include an emphasis on professional development in profile discussions with universities and that funding be identified for professional development including:

- an expansion of the Excellence in Teaching awards program; and
- the development of a program of professional development for academics, including formal teaching qualifications.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Recommendation Thirty-Seven**

The Committee is concerned that present resources for access by universities in regional areas to high bandwidth and telecommunications links are inadequate and recommends that the Government provide extra assistance to address this problem.

### **Recommendation Thirty-Eight**

The Committee recommends that the need to develop a strategy for development and support of regional universities and students living in regional areas be referred to the proposed advisory body, in consultation with state governments.

### **Recommendation Thirty-Nine**

The Committee recommends that the Government address as a matter of urgency the potential of the current round of General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) negotiations and resultant trade agreements to put at risk our national capacity to shape the future of our higher education system.