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# Keynote address

## Mind the gap: Universities as employers of choice

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Universities have been greatly unsettled by rapid change and increasing demands from government, community and students. As public institutions which enable knowledge rich nations, they carry a strong obligation to reflect the shifting expectations of their various stakeholders. However, the evolving context of higher education is generating some conflicting drivers of higher education change. On the one hand, Federal government funding is forcing more creative ways of building economically viable tertiary practices while students are seeking increased individualised support and presence from their university teachers. Similarly, the university sector regards its international positioning as increasingly critical while local communities are agitating for stronger relationships and partnerships with their higher education bodies.

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### Higher education reform: The Australian case study

The context for higher education in Australia has been particularly challenging as a number of very significant changes have been initiated by the Federal Government. In 2005 the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund was introduced. This competitive funding strategy was designed to reward universities which demonstrated the strongest teaching outcomes. Data generated from the Course Experience Questionnaire for graduates and a range of other indicators were gathered to assist in the allocation of funds to those deemed to be the best performers. For many universities, the results were confronting: only a handful of universities were recognised as excelling, and others were relegated to lower funding or none. Designed to generate greater focus on promoting quality outcomes for teaching and learning, the exercise actually generated many unintended consequences. In some cases, people with responsibility for teaching and learning policy and development lost their positions as recriminations ran high. Individual academics experienced increased scrutiny as their employers identified those who generated positive teaching outcomes - or the opposite. Universities are devoting considerable resources toward enhancing their learning and teaching strategies to improve their performance on the specified measures in readiness for 2006 indicators. The goal of improving learning and teaching outcomes is laudable but it has increased the load on university academics and those who provide their support. The strategy has stimulated increased consideration of Foundations of Teaching and Learning programmes and induction of new university teachers - evidence of the widespread concern for lifting teaching outcomes and effectiveness.

This particular initiative was but one of many innovations generated by the Australian federal government over recent years. The push toward a national research quality framework has generated an increased scrutiny of academic research effectiveness. In many universities academics have been reviewed in preparation for the forthcoming national comparisons. Although the new federal Minister for Education, Ms Julie Bishop, has wisely decided to review and refine the proposed system, some form of comparative system is likely to emerge from the current review to parallel those operating in New Zealand, the UK and other nations. Again, this process will stimulate stronger consideration of individual researchers and their

effectiveness. In some universities the expectations on academics have already increased substantially. For example, a greater focus on the quality of research outcomes and its impact on the international community are two powerful emphases which are already seeing changes to how research is viewed in universities. For many academics, there has been an increase in expectations for both teaching and research performance.

In tandem with the changes to teaching and research processes Australian academics have been faced with many other new regulatory frameworks across the sector. Funding for universities has been tied to many reforms which have forced rapid industrial change. In the last year alone universities have reformed their performance management and industrial relations strategies to reflect Australian government political reforms. In many instances the policy guiding these changes has been poorly formed and ill-considered before their imposition on a needy higher education sector. For example, the performance management changes have been tied to an insistence that poor performers be identified and addressed. The focus on performance *development* has shifted to a performance *management* emphasis, with a concomitant change to policy and practice. In a sector which has largely operated through building high commitment cultures, this focus on compliance has been met with strong uncertainty and concern. Similarly, the recent Australian government insistence that all higher education employees on low salaries should keep records of their hours of work attendance fails to recognise the concept of “being an academic” and all that it entails.

Universities also face increasing pressure from within. Students, a largely ignored stakeholder group, are gaining stronger force. The heydays of strong demand and oversubscription for university places has been replaced by a desperate push for new students – both locally and from overseas. In Western Australia, for example, a buoyant mining sector has become a major competitor as it pays amazing salaries to those willing to work in more remote locations. The lure of a well paid position has reduced the demand for university places in many of the universities. Stories of similar losses of revenue abound across the nation.

This is a challenging time for those working in higher education. Despite diminishing resources, universities are being asked to integrate many different reforms which are changing the nature of university work and broad expectations of individual academics. Finances are increasingly constrained as international competition grows and government policy further shapes the nature of higher education workplaces. The student expects

Universities now face a critical period in their evolution. As this Australian case study illustrates, the role of university academics is no longer a collegial context in which individuals negotiate a role that best fits their individual talents. Instead, there are increasing expectations that academics will be able to operate effectively as teachers, researchers and corporate citizens.

### **Envisioning future higher education**

The sector is currently moving toward a new and very different future context for higher education. The frameworks are already strongly in place in many of our universities. Most of us could readily identify some of these trends in our local institutions. In many cases they pose some critical questions about the directions our institutions are taking.

- Academic staff are increasingly required to demonstrate their contribution and commitment to university strategy to gain promotion and tenure. They can no longer

simply teach and research. This increased focus on service and strategic contribution is changing the nature and emphasis of university work. It is also pushing university staff to build a stronger awareness of the political context in which their universities are operating. In many cases, those working in higher education are ill-equipped to work in this politicised context.

- Expectations of staff are increasingly formalised and documented to provide guidance and focus to the work that is being undertaken. This articulation of what it means to be “an academic” changes the nature of the contract between the individual and the employer, particularly in terms of the types of outcomes that are required from each contributor. For many academics this articulation of academic work has been quite confronting – particularly if it reflects a different set of priorities to those currently enacted by the individual. There have been criticisms of universities as being increasingly “managerialistic” as these clarifications have been publicised. In the case of long-standing academics, the challenge of changing and adapting to these expectations has forced a review of whether universities still remain workplaces of choice.
- Stronger fiscal management has increased the pressure to reform curricula to address economic and sustainability concerns. There is considerable work being undertaken on reviewing the viability of teaching programmes to reduce the low demand units and increase economies of scale. Whole courses are being removed to reduce high cost, low yield areas of teaching. In some cases, this has reduced the access of local students to traditional courses of study. Physics and the humanities have been two areas which have suffered from this policy implementation. The media and local communities have demonstrated widespread concern over the loss of knowledge that an economic approach stimulates. And yet, the options for those leading universities are limited: programmes must be viable to survive. Of course, the question of whether universities should sponsor low yield but high importance programmes can also be raised. Do we have an obligation to preserve knowledge for the future generations, or to only work on the basis of current expectations and fiscal constraints?
- In many institutions there are decreasing resources to support the traditional academic activities of attending conferences and sharing knowledge across the sector. The expectation that academics will fund their own development is a concerning widespread trend. In areas of high demand where an academic can build an active relationship with the wider sector as a consultant self-funding may be a reasonable approach. For many academics with high teaching loads and little capacity to build a local consultancy profile, the use of external sources to fund development is a pipe dream. We are seeing an increasing divide between those who have access to support or funding streams, and those who are increasingly isolated from opportunities for growth. For those new to academe, or working in service areas, the lack of sponsorship for development purposes is particularly concerning.
- The “typical” early career academic is often perceived to be a younger person with a newly completed PhD. In fact, many people are entering academe after a considerable period away from higher education, and in many cases, with a PhD still to complete. They have families and commitments which sit poorly with the work roles, remuneration and conditions under which they operate.

- The competition for good staff is increasing. We have seen whole research groups poached by other universities (both national and international) to fast-track research profile building. Loyalty to an institution is a complex concept. Those who have been poached cite the concerns they have over the likely support for their research in the original institution. The processes by which research will be sustained in university communities needs to be made more explicit to ensure successful researchers have a sound understanding of the support they might reasonably expect. Conversely, universities will be under increasing pressure to build integral support for researchers. As some of our papers in this conference have demonstrated, there are some significant developmental issues facing research practice in higher education. Not the least is the lack of real support for those working primarily as researchers. The long-term well-being of researchers is an issue that must be addressed by university leaders.
- Those who work in research roles are facing increasing difficulties in sustaining a research career. Many are asked to teach without recognition for those activities and yet, they are not provided with the support offered to traditional teaching / research academics. As a prime example: university researchers are generally not provided with comparable study leave conditions. Those who are employed as contract employees have become particularly vulnerable to poor conditions caused by the funding gap between research plans and resultant resources. In many cases, research is being “cut down” to compensate for the dwindling resources obtained from research grants.
- Those universities which are research-intensive are finding that their capacity to pursue the funded research is made more challenging by the gap between research funding and research expenditure. It is anticipated that a variety of infrastructure costs will be met by the university, rather than the funding body. In many universities this has led to a reduction in teaching resources as funds are diverted to sustain the research endeavour.
- Still we see a high preponderance of males in senior academic positions. The concern for equity has encouraged more interventions to build a more diverse community, but it is largely operating at more junior levels. The glass ceiling remains hard to crack for those coming from more diverse backgrounds. There is little evidence of opportunities to learn and build senior leadership capabilities in a planned manner. Succession planning remains a limited concept in many universities, with those with high potential finding they need to move to a new university to lift their profile and opportunities. The lack of sponsorship of high potential candidates is a serious issue – we need to increase our support for those who have the capacity and desire to move into leadership roles. The traditional model of talent identification limits the recognition of those who have leadership potential but who operate in less central roles.
- Many academics are moving into “non-academic” roles, particularly in higher education service units. Academic development and student learning advisors are two major areas of growth where academics are seeking new ways of building a specialised and highly creative service niche. While these roles incorporate many comparable activities to those undertaken by traditional academics, the recognition of these emerging professions remains patchy at best. In many universities, a dichotomy between those deemed to be “academic” and others is clearly evident. The opportunities to build a range of capabilities in these positions are primarily through “on the job” experiences. The lack of recognition and development support is limiting the effectiveness of newcomers to this role, and reducing their capacity to be recognised for their contribution.

- The ageing higher education workforce is another critical concern for many universities. Demographic analyses reveal a major dilemma emerging for us all: our academics are getting much older and few new talented staff are available to pick up the baton and take their universities forward. In five to ten years, there will be a major reduction in the senior staff within our universities. This loss of knowledge and expertise will be a major issue for many universities. Widespread concern is already evident. However, suitable identification and preparation of the next generation is not.
- The desirability of working in a university has also diminished. Many of the younger academics are recognising that working in these settings will not support their lifestyle and needs. Contract employment, increased workloads and escalating performance expectations are reducing the desirability of working in universities.
- As younger generation X and Y staff move into academic roles, the incentives and attractors that encourage retention become a more concerning issue: our universities have failed to adequately reflect the expectations of our new future academics. At the same time, they are failing to adapt to the changing circumstances which many academics now find themselves facing. We see a trend toward increasing the range and intensity of roles that academics must undertake, without any paring or refinement of expectations to reduce the overall load and expectations. A fundamental question that needs to be considered is  
 “What are the major roles an academic should fulfil, and how can they be supported to undertake this work in a sustainable manner?” It is time to look closely at the nature of the work that academics are undertaking. The reduction in administrative support is a poor economy when the specialist contribution of academics is compromised because of their general duties. It is important to identify the core role versus more general work that might be undertaken by other support staff.
- At the same time, the role of the professional in universities has been poorly recognised and valued. The increasing complexity of university work has required a growth in the sophistication and skills of those supporting academic work. In many instances the interaction between academic and professional has been acrimonious, with each area believing the other to be a drain on resources rather than a valued contributor. Universities need to provide more opportunities for interaction across these groups so that the expertise and insights are valued and appropriately employed to build more creative solutions. The rise of a higher education professional is clearly evident. The knowledge professionals build while working across the sector is a valuable addition to university management – however, the capacity to share this wisdom and build more intelligent processes is predicated on being included in decision-making and agenda setting. In many cases the professional is regarded as an administrative support, not part of the leadership team. Where this attitude prevails, there is a high risk of building sub-optimal solutions that do not draw on professional theory and practice.
- Similarly, a number of universities promote a strong discipline-focused with a resultant loss of creativity and ingenuity in building more cross-disciplinary strategies. We need to build more receptive, creative responses to our curriculum and research design to encourage interaction across disciplines and institutions. However, many of the funding models and recognition systems fail to support more diversified approaches to teaching

and research. Universities need to review their internal processes to encourage collaboration and interaction across their various communities.

- There is also widespread recognition of the dearth of upcoming leaders in higher education. The role of university leader is often seen as a career limiting strategy, rather than an enhancement. And yet, the leadership of our higher education communities is of fundamental concern to us all. To date, the nurturing of potential university leaders remains ad-hoc and poorly addressed. Those who assume leadership roles in universities often learn through trial and error as to how best to lead and manage. In the process of learning, they often leave a number of victims behind. We need to build a stronger framework for university leadership, and to build peer-based communities which draw in new members. Some leadership levels have shown the way. At executive levels, for example, deans and Pro Vice Chancellors often have access to peer networks. However, this has the potential to be expanded. A major issue is the funding of people to attend meetings with their peers. Virtual communities are viable, but they require occasional sustenance through face to face meetings.
- Universities are commonly cited as being knowledge hubs for our communities. Certainly, many sources of wisdom and intellectual activity are to be found in these communities – however, structures and workloads limit the scope for knowledge building and sharing within and across universities. The value and importance of working with others is recognised but only marginally supported in practice. The pace of work and resourcing has greatly hampered the capacity to build and sustain relationships and interactions. As members of the higher education community we need to see the criticality of working with our peers and sharing knowledge and hard-won lessons. The value of that sharing is another way in which universities need to adapt to the new world in which they are situated.

These are but some of the many trends evident in our higher education communities. Over the last year I have spoken to many HERDSA members about their current work contexts, and the issues that are of concern to them. In all too many cases these are the elements which emerge again and again. It is clearly evident that our communities are hurting and need to be re-engaged and re-energized. Universities are at risk of losing their critical creative edge if urgent action is not taken. There is a real danger that university employees will start to look at alternative futures and careers to avoid the growing challenges which they now face. There are strong risks of disengagement and disenchantment unless we can draw more of our university community into the “inner circle” which possesses the knowledge, insight and capacity to influence the ongoing development of their institutions.

Unfortunately, for many university staff the gap between the rhetoric of an inclusive, engaged and strategic community and the reality of increasing workloads and decreasing ownership is widening for many institutions. The transition from collegial work settings to corporate modes of operation has been critically cited in reviews of higher education. In a number of cases, inexperienced leaders have translated corporate directions into highly managerial styles – where control over intellectual output and forms of working are rigidly managed. This has impacted greatly on university academics and professionals – particularly with respect to workloads, expectations and roles. We are at a critical juncture for higher education, where the best of a collegial approach, combined with rational but sensitive management can build a more viable path toward an entrepreneurial innovative future.

## **The future for higher education: The critical path**

For many academics, the answer appears simple: focus on retaining the collegial setting and ignore the many external drivers of change. However, this is a naïve and impractical response which also contributes to the many difficulties that are being encountered. The reality is that universities have changed. They are no longer academies where individual academics can pursue their own intellectual pursuits and teach in areas of preferred interest. Universities cannot afford to operate as traditional bastions of knowledge. Our national communities want a different mode of operation and expect quite different forms of outcomes from the funds invested. In many cases, there is considerable concern over the capacity of many institutions to provide a comprehensive curriculum and the growing duplication of courses of study. The debate over what universities offer communities often fails to explore the broader philosophical contributions that extend beyond vocational training. Even where these conversations emerge, there is also a recognition that universities are no longer funded to do the things they wish to do. Instead, they must move toward a different mode of operation which reflects the external context in which they reside and the financial constraints which are pushing the reform agenda.

It is time to build real and highly engaged university communities, with academic and professional staff who have a keen grasp of the higher education context and the capacity to adapt their responses in an effective and efficient manner. While it is still possible to pursue intellectual and research-intensive foci, there is increasing pressure to meld the personal with the institutional concerns. It is a very different context to ten years ago.

There are a number of ways in which universities can bridge the rhetoric-reality gap which currently plagues many of our institutions.

First, it is important to clarify the organisation's values and focus. In many cases, there is little understanding of the university and its functions by those who fulfil the goals. Each new academic (and those currently working in the university) should be exposed to the principles which underpin the organisational philosophy. In many cases, the shift from the traditional academic context to a more strategic emphasis has required a concomitant change in priorities to match new expectations. However, the communication and promotion of this change frequently fails to percolate down to those individuals who are likely to execute the new strategy. A successful reshaping of values can be seen at the University of Melbourne where its strategic position paper was widely disseminated to encourage staff knowledge of major cultural and structural change. Communication of vision and practicalities encourages greater ownership of the strategic agenda.

The provision of suitable development opportunities for university staff is a critical factor in building an adaptive and flexible work community and in retaining talented staff. Younger employees judge the value of an organisation by the way in which they are nurtured and supported by their employers. Academics, for example, need access to a range of developmental opportunities. They need to access conferences to build collaborative networks, to learn from expert sources and be challenged by other ways of thinking. Conferences and meetings are extremely important mechanisms for developing potential partnerships and associations. Those who are unable to participate in these events are likely to suffer increased disengagement from their discipline and to feel that they are not valued by their employers. This is one area where organisational practice requires significant reform. In a number of universities conferences are now regarded as a privilege, not a right. However,

their value to the individual, the discipline and the wider higher education community must be recognised.

Individuals also need access to other forms of development. The changing context in which we work is generating more and different expectations as we move toward dynamic work contexts and evolving futures. The skills and capabilities required to work as an academic in the 1990s are vastly different from those required in the mid 2000s. Careful consideration of the changing work context and its implications for new skill development needs to become a more integral element of higher education practice. Academics must increase their skills to match the changing context in which they work – in other words, to reflect lifelong learning principles. And this pressure to continuously improve requires ongoing development avenues, as well as the encouragement to participate in those avenues. The recognition of learning as a critical work value is one area where, ironically, we need to put considerably more effort. There is strong evidence that those under pressure feel they cannot devote time to learning more efficient and effective work-related strategies. In these situations it is most important that those in leadership roles encourage and guide their subordinates toward development opportunities and then assist the transfer of that knowledge back into the work community.

Effective leadership of the university communities assists universities to be responsive and effective institutions. Leaders are critical ingredients in the higher education mix. And yet, in many settings there is very limited consideration of how leaders may develop their own knowledge of the university context and its changing reality. This is certainly a major concern. Academic heads often require strong support when they assume significant leadership roles. They need to build a sense of themselves as leaders and to gain a repertoire of skills which will enable their successful leadership of their particular community. Their corporate knowledge must encompass an awareness of university strategy as well as the systems which are inherent in the University. The provision of coaches, mentors and sponsors are very major assets during the formative phase of building new leaders. A formal development programme is also a major mechanism for increasing the capabilities of our leaders. There are several universities which are pursuing these approaches, but there are also many universities which have failed to recognise the need to provide support for their academic leaders.

Leadership does not only rest with those who assume discipline, department or faculty roles. Many university staff hold responsibility for programmes, projects, teams and relationship building across the university and beyond the campus setting. Again, these roles are complex and increasingly critical to the organisational outcomes. They are core business that should be treated seriously and with due consideration as to how those processes can best be cultivated and sustained.

The span of responsibilities that an individual may hold places increasing pressure on their personal management skills. Prioritisation and time management, information technology skills and marketing strategies are but a few of the new strategies which university staff must demonstrate. Perhaps it is time to look again at how we prepare staff for their roles in the modern university? The traditional internship of a PhD offers some elements which are useful guides toward future practice but it is certainly insufficient for the more advanced roles which will be assumed in later years. Universities that are serious about their reputation and responsiveness need to be much more rigorous in supporting their staff as they evolve toward new and more senior roles.

Provision of suitable learning opportunities and source of guidance which promote best practice increase the capacity of the organisation to meet the many challenges that are likely to emerge. At present, the primary development focus in universities relates to teaching and learning. This will be insufficient to meet the emerging challenges of higher education policy and practice. Leadership, academic and professional development are three areas which require additional resourcing if universities are to be well-positioned to meet the changing demands and challenges that are already evident. In a period of high economic uncertainty, there has been a tendency to reduce resources into development services. This is unwise - development is an important retention strategy where staff are highly talented and mobile.

### **Universities as employers of choice?**

The sector faces some very real challenges in maintaining and promoting its attractiveness as an employment option. The heart of academe lies in its pursuit of intellectual endeavours and the excitement that is generated through discovery and the cultivation of knowledge. We need to hold those values close as we also refine and reduce the areas of wasted activity and unstrategic effort. This will require a concerted effort on the part of academics and professionals to identify and preserve the core knowledge which is of value to the institution. The recognition of the expertise and knowledge that professionals also contribute requires similar respect.

In the long-term, the preservation of a creative workforce is critical to the long-term sustainability of our universities. However, this is matched by a responsibility on the part of the individual to embrace change, new challenges and new ways of operating. The concept of “being academic” is changing to reflect the altered national circumstances of universities. There is a need to work in more creative and responsive ways to embrace the many new and exciting opportunities that are emerging. Similarly, we must recognise the evolving roles that we undertake and take responsibility for developing our capabilities to better undertake those roles. In return, we have a reasonable expectation that universities will provide suitable opportunities for growth and development.

Universities are exciting work environments. The capacity to continually learn and evolve is a challenge that many employees relish and welcome. The values and principles of higher education are close to our own hearts. However, we are at a critical period where the shift from collegial to corporate contexts can dissolve those connections. The retention of the best of the collegial mode of working must be retained, while recognising the importance of designing rational and responsive management processes that allow for ready and effective deployment of resources across the university enterprise.

The cultivation of effective, sensitive and motivational leaders is perhaps the greatest challenge facing our sector. The recognition and nurturing of different leadership styles is particularly critical to our sustainable growth. The introduction of new forms of executive structures and roles, such as Deputy Vice Chancellor (Community), demonstrates the positive focus on building greater connectedness between university, stakeholders and its various communities. However, the critical link between senior leadership and those who implement the university’s agenda must be recognised.

A further area which impacts hugely on the desirability of universities as workplaces of choice relates to the culture within each community. There has been considerable discussion of the values inherent in universities. New staff often feel isolated. They do not sense a strong

community which will support and assist them. Each member of the university has a strong responsibility to actively engage with colleagues, students and other stakeholders. There is an associated responsibility to stand up and speak out against bullying, unethical behaviour and prejudicial treatment. It is pleasing to see more people standing up for the values that should underpin academic settings. The acculturation of new and existing staff into these value sets is a fundamental element of guiding universities toward more effective and sustainable modes of operation.

## **The role of HERDSA**

HERDSA has also experienced many challenges as the face of higher education has evolved. In Australia and New Zealand there has been substantial shifting of policy and funding to drive higher education reform. In some instances, major resources have been devoted to building national strategies that address many of the issues raised in this paper. The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, for example, is a significant support for educational processes. Its initiatives will enable a stronger cross-disciplinary interaction by peers and has the potential to build a powerful knowledge community. HERDSA has contributed to the formative discussion of many Carrick initiatives, which has been pleasing, and values the opportunity to work with a dedicated agency of this nature. However, the Institute's brief focuses on teaching and learning and leaves many of the other areas unaddressed.

For many years HERDSA has focused on the teaching and learning activities of higher education. It has promoted good practice and built a number of initiatives that assist academics. The journal, *Green Guides* and *HERDSA News* are but a few of the services which have encouraged better higher education practice. These services still fulfil an important function in our academic community. However, the changing landscape opens new opportunities for societies like HERDSA to more fully assist those working in universities.

There is potential, for example, to develop more guidance on the nature of academic work, the capabilities which are necessary and the ways in which they may be cultivated. Discussions of these changing contexts would assist many universities struggling with the reshaping of their approaches to their staff. A considered focus on university leadership is one which has yet to be properly explored in Australasia. HERDSA's spanning of various institutions in a non-competitive context provides an ideal forum for exploring the nature of higher education policy, practice and cultures.

HERDSA also has the potential to build stronger local communities to enable critical conversations on higher education to be held across regions, nationally and internationally. There is a pressing need to open up a number of issues for debate and consideration. It should be noted that strategies which encourage local community development are contingent on two things. First, the areas of focus need to be highly engaging and relevant to those local communities. Second, the members within local regions need to be active in supporting those initiatives. A society like HERDSA only operates effectively if it is closely in tune with its membership and vice versa.

The role of HERDSA in influencing national policy and practice is an area receiving considerable attention at present. The development of submissions and representation to various bodies is recognised as being most important, but at present, we rely on a few keen

individuals to prepare a submission. There is further work to be done in building a collective sense of the issues and responses that HERDSA may make on behalf of its members.

A look at the international scene highlights some other strategies that HERDSA might consider in its efforts to support its members as higher education changes. The UK, US and Canadian models, for example, incorporate a strong focus on professional development of members. With the growth in HERDSA Fellowship numbers we now have the capacity to build more intensive learning communities across our regions. These could greatly assist members as they move into new or expanded roles in a changing higher education context. Collaboration with our international colleagues is also a real possibility as we experience common trends across the international community.

The debate over professional skilling of academic developers is an issue not yet explored within HERDSA. Academic developers come from many different settings and backgrounds, and play an increasingly important role in guiding the practice of academic staff and leaders. Australasia has not fully engaged with the issue of educating those developers. There is potential to collaborate internationally with other groups to build an international strategy to educate academic developers.

## **Conclusion**

The rhetoric-reality gap is real and significant. It is a time of immense change in higher education. Each of us faces new challenges in renegotiating our roles and contributions to our employers, our disciplines and our professional communities. Similarly, universities must recognise the issues they should address to remain attractive and competitive environments.

However, in times of flux it is also important to recognise that each of us plays an important part in reshaping our higher education context. The roles we undertake and the leadership we demonstrate are major factors in making universities desirable and sustainable work settings. Ultimately, it comes down to each individual and the contributions we make as corporate citizens and professional colleagues. HERDSA looks forward to travelling down that critical path with each of you.

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