Professor Sharon Bell has recently concluded a five-year term as Deputy Vice Chancellor at Charles Darwin University. She is an Honorary Professor at the Australian National University and Emeritus Professor at the University of Wollongong.

As Deputy Vice Chancellor at Charles Darwin University Professor Bell had what might be described as an unparalleled coupling of strategic and leadership challenges in the tertiary education sector. In this role, with responsibility for the International, Research and Academic portfolios she led a highly focussed and strategic engagement agenda that concentrated on developing long-term and multi-faceted relationships with a small number of valued partners, together with capacity building investment in a wider range of institutions in the region. She has also ensured that CDU remained committed to significantly increased student mobility through the New Colombo Plan. Throughout her career Sharon has also been privileged to work closely with Australian Indigenous Communities. Her award winning documentary 88.9 Radio Redfern was first screened on Australian television in 1989, is regularly rescreened on NITV and was this year screened at the ARC cinema in Canberra as part of the Black Screen program. Professor Bell established the University of Wollongong's artistic exchange program with the Yolngu community of Yirrkala, a link that was strengthened during her time at CDU with community leaders at Galiwin'ku. Professor Bell is a Board member of Ninti One, the managing entity of the CRC for Remote Economic Participation. Professor Bell was also a Board member of TVS Sydney from 2010-2016.

UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT IN A 'POST-TRUTH' WORLD

At the turn of the century the late Sir David Watson and Professor Michael Gibbons were actively involved with a number of Australian universities to develop conceptual roadmaps for engagement. The interest in engagement at the time was forged by the emergent 'knowledge economy' together with the UK's introduction of Third Stream funding linked to Knowledge Transfer. The socio-political climate was arguably vastly different to that to which we must now respond.

The emergence of a 'post-truth' era in tandem with the pervasive impact of decades of neo-liberal government policies demands re-imagining of what it means to be an 'engaged university'. It demands that we acknowledge the lack of trust in the academy and the ambiguous messages we generate re our 'public good' role. It also demands that we be cognisant of the dramatically changed nature of our university communities, in terms of the engagement of students and staff and our defining relationships with them. In an increasingly stratified sector these changing relationships have the potential to threaten our capacity to engage and to maintain the longevity of commitment for which we have historically been valued.

If we are now operating in a post-truth era this has the obvious effect of calling in to question the relevance of the academy and marginalising the very institutions that are at the centre of the knowledge economy. We need to address 'the fallen status of our collective search for truth' and meet the challenge of

positively influencing 'how our era will be described'. To do this we need to stretch our moral imagination beyond neo-liberal constructions.

Oxford Dictionaries declared 'post-truth' to be its 2016 word of the year, as did the *Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache*[1]. 'Post-truth', or postfaktisch, is defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. The concept of post-truth has been in existence for the past decade, but Oxford Dictionaries mapped a spike in frequency in 2016 in the context of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States. The Dictionary notes that post-truth seems to have been first used in this meaning in a 1992 essay by the late Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich in *The Nation* magazine with reference to the Iran-Contra scandal and the Persian Gulf War. Tesich observed that 'we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world'. Ralph Keyes, *The Post-truth Era*, appeared in 2004.[2] At that time most of us were oblivious to the import and wide ranging repercussions of this development even though studying the post-truth world, agnotology, was an established field of study that had its roots in studies of cancer and the tobacco industry (Proctor 1995). With reference to the rise of agnotology Rose & Barros (2017) make an assertion that should be read as a challenge writ large to the contemporary academy:

> *The overarching issue is the fallen status of our collective search for truth, in its many forms. It is no longer a positive attribute to seek out truth, determine biases, evaluate facts, or share knowledge.*[3]

Ironically the emergence of the concept of a 'post-truth' era was contemporaneous with that of the articulation of the changing place of the academy in the 'knowledge economy'. Professor Michael Gibbons and colleagues' *The New Production of Knowledge* (1994) was produced in a parallel universe but provided many clues to changes that would impact on the role and status of universities and academics as knowledge producers.

Many of us in the academy, thinking we were part of a social historical moment rather than a neo-liberal politico-intellectual movement (Nik-Khah, 2015: 57) were excited by the concept of universities at the centre of a new economy, immersed in the 'agora' in partnership with other producers of knowledge and respectful of community 'knowledges'4. We embraced the projected movement away from the production of knowledge within academic disciplines towards the application of knowledge to specific problems in specific contexts (Robertson, 2000: 90). We can see with hindsight that we should have been reflecting on the implications of the 'shift from intellectual coherence, which is being lost to the transdisciplinarity of this knowledge production…' (Gibbons,1994:83) raising the seemingly obvious questions: Who will produce? To what end? And who will be able to access this complex, transdisciplinary knowledge that lacks coherence and is increasingly contested? [5]

Furthermore while this new knowledge production was seen to be 'socially distributed and continuously expanding', (1994:14) we would have also been wise to revisit Drucker's reflections on the 20th century, his treatise on the rise of 'knowledge workers' (1957) and his observations re the displacement of industrial workers in the knowledge economy, even though his observations hauntingly reflect Mayo's (1922:159) belief that workers were incapable of developing the learning skills necessary for organised capitalism without elite leadership:[6]

...the great majority of the new jobs require qualifications the industrial worker does not possess and is poorly equipped to acquire. They require a good deal of formal education and the ability to acquire and to apply theoretical and analytical knowledge. They require a different approach and a different mind-set. Above all, they require a habit of continuous learning. Displaced industrial workers cannot simply move into knowledge work or services the way farmers and domestic workers moved into industrial work. At the very least they have to change their basic attitudes, values and beliefs.

(Drucker, 1994:6)

Whilst Drucker was right to observe that this move to a knowledge economy and the accompanying displacement of blue-collar workers had, at the turn of the century, not lead to 'radicalisation' as generally understood, it has more recently led to the emergence of transgressive, alternative right social movements pursuing agendas that have the potential to undermine the established social fabric as effectively as any radical revolutionary movement. As an aside one might also note that Drucker predicted that in the knowledge society 'for the first time in history, the possibility of leadership will be open to all.' (1994:9)

When Michael Gibbons outlined how he saw university engagement evolving in the knowledge economy of the 21st century he spoke of the joint production of socially robust knowledge with communities; the need for open, exploratory systems that are responsive to the growing complexity and uncertainty of the problems and issues that need to be addressed; the shift from the production of reliable knowledge to that of socially robust knowledge; and the development of a continuously shifting set of social relations in boundary spaces and transaction zones. He painted the picture of an exciting, even if challenging, scientific world with a nimble academy at its centre. He noted that such engagement will not be without tension, including that generated by the wider range of perspectives and opinions that need to be addressed when 'society speaks back'. He emphasised that this fuller participation in the agora also requires that universities make it clear that it is their intention to serve the public good—public good equated with not just the health of the economy (Gibbons 2005).

The ambiguity associated with the public good versus private/individual benefit of universities promulgated by the rhetoric of current government higher education and innovation policy is one source of tension in universities forging relationships with the communities with whom they interact. The displacement

of industrial workers and growing suspicion and mistrust of the academy and the knowledge it produces that inevitably impacts on community partnerships generates further tension and demands we revisit and revise our understanding of, and strategies for, 'engagement'.

'Post-truth' political phenomena have shaken our understanding of contemporary, participatory democracy. But the emergent 'politics of resentment' (Cramer 2016) has also generated renewed calls for the 'engagement' of academics, researchers and universities. Professor Carl-Heldin, Chairman of the Board of the Nobel Foundation, in his official welcome to the 2016 Nobel Prize Award Ceremony reminded his audience that:

Leading politicians – both in Europe and the United States – are winning votes by denying knowledge and scientific truths. Populism is widespread and is reaping major political successes.

The grim truth is that we can no longer take it for granted that people believe in science, facts and knowledge.

...The twenty-first century has begun with a growing sense of fear, and there is concern that conflicts will characterise this century as well. But such a development is not pre-destined. It is our task to influence how our era will be described, and there is good reason to be hopeful. We see a growing interest among young people in seeking knowledge. And we see an ever increasing engagement in tackling major global challenges.[7]

But in the rubric of the 'politics of resentment' we, the academy, run the risk of being cast as a privileged and oppressive part of the neo-liberal elite by the disenfranchised, especially the rural and non-metropolitan disenfranchised. Our cries that we do not represent the capitalist establishment ring hollow. We have unwittingly set the pre-conditions for 'an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact'. (Latour, 2004:227)

In what might now be regarded as the halcyon days of the engaged university the Association of Commonwealth Universities produced a definition of engagement that became a mantra for many responsible for emerging 'engagement' portfolios:

...strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities' aims, purposes and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; the back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and citizens.

(Bjarnason & Coldstream 2003: i)

Strenuous, thoughtful and argumentative interaction is attractive for those who consider themselves university thought leaders but such interaction demands willingness to interact with our communities on foundations of broad trust, mutual respect and good will. The imperative for engagement has never been stronger but the changed context and key conditions of the public good role of universities and student and staff engagement have radically altered over the past decade.

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Professor Simon Marginson, following Murphy (2015), in his exploration of *Higher Education and the Common Good* (2016) asserts that after two decades of the Neo-Liberal Market Model:

...higher education has become more business-like and competitive, more productive in volume terms and almost more certainly financially efficient, although there is no evidence that teaching is better or that the rate of fundamental discovery in research has quickened.

(2016,220)

Increasing inequality in the Anglo-American world drives greater need but also creates new barriers to engagement. The challenge now is to rethink engagement as we grasp the significance of the post-truth era and the impact of neo-liberal government policies and funding regimes.

ENGAGEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

In what seems a policy lifetime ago the engagement of universities and their communities received attention in the Australian government 2002 Ministerial Discussion Paper Higher Education at the Crossroads (Nelson, 2002). The Minister invited the university sector to provide input to the development of a 'Third Stream' funding model similar to that which had been introduced in the UK. A number of strategies were canvassed, including:

- Payment of a 'social premium' to universities to deliver community service obligations within their region;

- State governments to contribute to the cost of some activities on a fee-for-service basis; and

- Funding of community bodies to purchase the higher education services they need.

(IRU, 2005:2)

These issues were never resolved and Australia has not yet seen the equivalent of Third Stream funding which in the UK was introduced specifically to support HEIs to increase their capability to respond to the needs of business and the wider community and has now morphed into the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) standing at £601 Million 2011-2015.[8]

Even though the UK model was firmly grounded in the context of 'a neo-liberal market-facing agenda' that sought to encourage a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurialism and to generate commercial activities that would be of economic benefit to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the state (Clough & Bagley 2012: 178), Australian proposals were at pains to emphasise the public good over commercial imperatives.

The Innovative Research Universities group emphasised that:

It is important from the outset to emphasise that Third Stream funding is not only, or even primarily, for universities to undertake commercial work. While much discussion about Third Stream activity focuses on the commercial application of knowledge and capabilities, vast amounts of university knowledge are shared freely for the public good, resulting in

economic and social benefits. (IRU, 2005: 3)

ENGAGEMENT IN A NEO-LIBERAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT

If we are now operating in a post-truth era this has the obvious effect of calling in to question the relevance of the academy and marginalising the very institutions that are at the centre of the knowledge economy. Neo-liberalism compounds this by offering

...the artifice of market design where the competitive order of market relationships becomes the framework for social life in general. To establish this institutional design, neo-liberal doctrine uses the authority and sovereignty of the state against the very nature of the state as a political-legal container for social life.

(Yeatman 2015:31)

The neo-liberal principle of restraining taxation and the resource base available to public institutions compromises the capacity of institutions to prioritise and fulfil their public good role. The impact on engagement is that when private good accruing to the individual student is believed to be ubiquitous and more obvious and credible than public good[9], public spending is constrained and the public perception of the nature and role of universities is altered. This is particularly important in Australia, where the tax to GDP ratio is in the bottom 20 per cent of the 34 OECD developed economies even though surveys indicate that 80 per cent of Australians believe that the country is high- or mid-taxing (Hetherington, 2015:27).

Marginson argues that neo-liberal discourse has been influential in higher education policy and regulation through a focus on market reform though 'the full capitalist economic market remains fairly distant from real world practice' with universities 'remaining incompatible with the neo-liberal imaginary' (2016:220). The questions about higher education are: how far has it been remade along the lines of a capitalist market? And how far can it be remade? (2016: 217). The emergence of New Public Management (neo-liberal business models and market templates, bureaucratic control systems that emphasise audit and accountability, and transparency and individuation) and the Neo-Liberal Market Model fail to take in to account that knowledge is intrinsically public in form and teaching in higher education 'cannot be wholly marketised without thinning the knowledge component'. Marginson contends that the neo-liberal model also fails to take in to account the degree to which graduates are not rewarded in labour markets for knowledge but for private goods – vocational skills and certification, particularly from high status institutions, in tandem with the social and cultural capital they bring to, and enhance, in elite higher education institutions (2016:216-237).

Marginson documents the emergence of an increasingly stratified higher education system in the Anglo-American world (in contrast to the Nordic system) in which the beneficiaries are primarily those with social and political capital:

Higher education provides a stratified structure of opportunity, from elite universities and high status professional degrees to the much larger number of mass education places with uncertain prospects. As every family knows, relative advantage is crucial, and students from affluent families tend to dominate the high value positions...

(Marginson, 2016:286)

When the public face of universities is increasingly business-like and institutional success is measured in growth of student load, research productivity and associated revenue; when Vice-Chancellors' salary packages are publicly reported to be 'skyrocketing'[10]; when there is a significant presence of competitive marketing material on individual universities in the public arena; when prospective students, especially international students, are defined as a 'market' and current students as 'clients'; and when our proclivity to critique generates broad distrust of scientific facts, it becomes increasingly challenging to maintain the status of 'public good' institutions in the eyes of our students and our communities.

This is exacerbated by the fact that over the past 25 years commodification has permeated every aspect of higher education from the highly visible export of educational services, increases in student fees and the commercialisation of research, to the less visible 'outsourcing' of the services that underpin large and complex institutions, from cleaning to catering, student accommodation, IT, HR and what might be regarded as core business functions, student attraction, retention and support services.[11] Tutoring support is now even available through Uberversity.[12] Such changes have significant impact in outer-metropolitan, rural and remote communities when local producers and suppliers and local expertise may be by-passed for large corporate supply chains and the increasingly dominant metro-based consulting companies ready to sell anything from a new strategic plan to improved student retention together with new forms of incentivising and disciplining knowledge workers.

One might be tempted to argue that this is the realisation of a neo-liberal dream but if universities are central to the 'knowledge economy' is this commodification of every facet of our operations inevitable and what are the implications for engagement premised on public good?

In 2002, The World Bank published *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*. In this report, as one might expect, the Bank argued that 'knowledge accumulation and application have become major factors in economic development and are, increasingly, at the core of a country's competitive advantage in the global economy' (The World Bank, 2002: xvii).

This report focused on how tertiary education contributes to capacity building in a country so that it can contribute to 'an increasingly knowledge-based world economy' and outlined policy options for tertiary education. It emphasizes the following trends:

- The emerging role of knowledge as a major driver of economic development.

- The appearance of new providers of tertiary education in a 'border-less-education environment'.

- The transformation of modes of delivery and organizational patterns in tertiary education as a result of the information and communications revolution.

- The rise of market forces in tertiary education and the emergence of a global market for advanced human capital.

(The World Bank, 2002: xix)

But the Bank also recognised the need for a balanced and comprehensive view of education as a holistic system which includes 'not only the human capital contribution of tertiary education but also its critical humanistic and social capital building dimensions and its role as an important global, human, public good'. (Dreyer, W. & Kouzmin, A. 2009)

Marginson echoes this imperative:

...if capitalist markets are clearly unachievable in higher education, a more authentic modernisation reform agenda is needed in higher education, and one that is focused on public goods as well as private goods.

(2016:251)

As a sector we have embraced the opportunity to be central to the knowledge economy. In *Academic Capitalism in the New Economy*, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) emphasise that higher education institutions are in fact initiating academic capitalism. In other words, instead of the market forcing institutions into an environment of academic capitalism, universities and their faculty are actively seeking engagement with the market.

This is a scenario in which mass participation is leading to an increasing burden of cost slated back to the student; where 'education' morphs into training and credentialism accessed through bite-sized modules that can be 'effectively' delivered through for profit 'thin' and low cost private providers or business arms of universities that employ academic piece workers on casual and fixed-term contracts; where the embracing of Gibbons' Mode 2 research[13] leads to dependence on commercial imperatives and the pursuit of research outcomes that have the potential to be commercialised; and where research priorities are increasingly under government scrutiny and framed to support government policy and economic imperatives.

The risk is that the idea of the university as a place of advanced learning and critical thinking or of higher education as a 'public good' whose social mission is to reproduce national culture and serve the public interest, summed up in the now-anachronistic phrase 'education for citizenship' is being replaced by the narrower instrumental view of university knowledge as a personal investment and form of training. Within this new neo-liberal knowledge-economy paradigm, students have been

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recast as 'rational, self-interested, choosers and consumers' who will drive up quality through exercising choice while education itself is increasingly being re-conceptualised 'as a commodity: something to be sold, traded and consumed'. (Shore, C. & Taitz, M. 2012)

STUDENT AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT

We should not be surprised then, that Blackmore (2013) in her analysis of student and academic dissatisfaction notes that: students increasingly view education as a positional good and are highly instrumental in their choices; their future employment is precarious, one reliant upon building portfolio careers in which they package multiple skills; employers seek to recruit flexible and responsive workers with the capacity to communicate, possessing good interpersonal skills, confidence, intercultural competence, and competence in English language skills as well a workplace integrated learning experiences; they seek 'best fit' above and beyond academic results ; and universities seek to provide a distinctive educational experience in the production of these employability skills listed as graduate outcomes.

Yet it has been apparent for some time that for too many of our students, and disproportionately those from low socio-economic backgrounds, the experience of higher education is 'thin' and getting thinner (Bell, S. & Bentley, R. 2006; Marginson 2016). In the context of declining state support for higher education the turn of the last century saw a spate of works on the emergence of the 'entrepreneurial' university and the articulation of the concept of 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter & Leslie 1997). A number of the Australian works in this field offer astute predictive commentary on the inevitability of change driven by mass higher education. In 1988 the University of Sydney's Anthony Welsh, who has provided an ongoing critique of issues that attach to internationalisation of Australian higher education, observed that in the context of policies of 'education for all' and a move away from elitist to mass higher education 'this can only mean one thing: a constriction of opportunities for the less privileged, and a shift to resources towards the wealthier groups in society' (1988:387).

And ten years later Coaldrake & Steadman (1998) identified, well before we imagined the pervasive impact of the internet and social media on information dissemination, that it is not true that the university is the only type of institution capable of creating knowledge, providing access to knowledge, and fostering learning in students that enable them to use knowledge. They observed that traditional academic means of production were sustainable only 'while universities remained small and of only marginal relevance to the country'. Is it a consequence of being intertwined with an economic system, as David Kirp suggested (2003), rather than at the margins in an autonomous, supporting role?

Current policy settings generate not just economic questions around competition and institutional sustainability but profound moral questions around individual economic

versus societal good and equality as explicit values that have underpinned our higher educational aspirations. The 1990 national equity framework *A Fair Chance for All* (DEET, 1990) with its underlying premise and tag line 'Higher Education that's Within Everyone's Reach', having been briefly revived by the Bradley Review and the introduction of the Demand Driven System, is now under significant pressure (Harvey et al, 2016). We have a profound and enduring responsibility to ensure that not just equity and access for all remain an established part of the fabric of our sector, but that the scope and quality of the higher education experience is not just passively 'available' but is actively promoted. This is the foundation for an economically successful and cohesive society as well as the mechanism for individual social mobility and regional sustainability – even if it is a 'market distortion', or indeed not a market at all.

In Australia there are many positive changes that are a result of our moves towards mass higher education that theoretically enable enhanced engagement. Over recent decades universities have grown in size, scale and therefore capacity; the student population is increasingly diverse, representing a wider range of our communities; there is a higher proportion of mature age students who bring prior knowledge and valuable work experience into the academy; our student, particularly our post-graduate student, and staff populations are becoming more internationalised, which helps to forge bonds and partnerships based on shared knowledge and established relationships; we also have many more opportunities for students to be engaged in internship and mobility programs, such as through the New Colombo Plan.

But countering these positives is a perverse potentially negative impact of the changing nature of institutions and their relationship with students that is worthy of note. As many of us become 'thinner' institutions and our engagement with our students also becomes 'thin' all but the elite institutions begin to look more like the (generally very thin) private providers. If we are offering little more to our students than content and technical skills, and not doing very well at negotiating the 'delivery' of these to meet their needs, there are many and increasing options available to our students in the educational market place.

I often wonder whether our eyes have been wide shut to the profound changes that are taking place in our sector and the underlying ideological drivers. One of the areas where there is an eerie silence is that of employment practices and the future of the academy.

Josh Freedman in a memorable Forbes article (2014) posed the question: what do an NCAA football player, a student intern, a university janitor and a college lecturer have in common? The answer, none of them are regular employees of the universities where they perform their services. Freedman reminds us that contingent, sub-contracted employment has always existed, and practitioners and professional adjuncts have always been important contributors to tertiary education, but the change that has taken place over the past two decades is that casual staff and fixed-term contractors have replaced full-time faculty,

a theme explored in detail by education professor Adrianna Kezar of the University of Southern California under the Delphi Project[14].

Over the past two decades concern has been expressed re the future and the aging profile of the Australian academic workforce. (Hugo 2005 & 2008; Hugo & Morris 2010) It is important to note however that this influential research and modelling fails to recognize the true crisis in the academic workforce as it is based on government data that does not adequately capture the size and scale of the casual academic workforce. The casual workforce is estimated on the basis of recent research that accessed de-identified UniSuper data to be up to 67,000 individuals—a greater number than the 'tenured core'. Women form the majority of these staff (57%) and over half are 35 years or younger (May et al, 2013).

A critical quality of engagement is longevity. This is especially important in forging and maintaining international partnerships where ritualised, diplomatic relationship building may take years to generate mutual trust and then commitment to, and investment in, common interests. Universities have historically been very stable institutions peopled by significant numbers of staff who have had the expertise, time and commitment to seek and create opportunities and partnerships, to engage in relationship building and to ensure that all involved, from within the academy and from the community, understand and share common goals. Anyone who has worked in an outer metropolitan, regional or remote university is aware that universities are required to do a lot of things other providers are not and institutions must work to meet the often very high expectations of their communities.[15] They would also be aware that the many facets of engagement to meet community expectations are under intense pressure as students are increasingly part-time, in employment, and studying off-campus. Expectations of staff continue to expand yet an increasing proportion of the academic workforce is casual or employed on short term contracts. Contrary to popular perception the Australian research and university sectors are in fact increasingly players in the 'gig economy', with growing dependency on independent contractors, temporary workers or freelancers. The 'gig' economy may sound positive and innovative, but simply disguises the 'contingent workforce' to which it refers.

In Australia doctoral graduates and early career academics experience precarious work arrangements and, through a process of generational change, insecurity has replaced continuing or tenured employment. The post-doctoral world is now characterised by career uncertainty, low comparative salary levels, serial post-docs, multiple employers and a research funding pool that has not kept up with the growth of exceptionally highly qualified participants in the system. In a system that thrives on individual 'sponsorship' there are fewer mentor/sponsors for every early career researcher and national and global mobility are no longer a privilege but a necessity for success. Success is also deemed to be linked to commercialisation of research.

Older generations would say it has always been thus – academics, particularly those in the sciences, are expected to earn their salaries and cover their research costs through grants and consultancy. But the experience of the past bears little resemblance to the experience of younger generations today. Now the 'gigs' are often so short that half way through grant funded employment the researcher is distracted by the necessity of finding or generating the next 'gig'.

All deserve equity and dignified livelihoods and if we are to achieve our goal to be a leading contributor to innovation we need to question whether the 'gig' economy we are currently embracing is appropriate, whether it will sustain our national ambitions as an innovator, and whether it will support the diversity upon which innovation thrives.[16]

We already see how cash-strapped universities find it difficult to support their academics financially while the academics produce scholarly papers and intellectual property that is then made freely available to others who work in institutions that are competing with each other to attract students and industry's research dollars. Teaching focused positions and casualisation become the answer.

The critical question we need to pose is, in the knowledge economy, are we in fact contributing to the growth of an academic workforce of piece workers whilst failing to sustain the academy? Will this role become the preserve of the elite research intensive universities and what will the consequences be for diversity and quality within our sector? Will this need be served by the global rather than the regional academic workforce? How will the innovation driven by necessity in the nation's periphery be translated back to the core? And what does engagement look like in this context?

So whilst the temptation is to suggest the framing of our role in the knowledge economy is a neo-liberal conspiracy, the reality may be that we have been deficient in exercising the 'moral imagination' that would sustainably accommodate mass participation in higher education in the knowledge economy. There is a pervasive need to recognize that neo-liberalism and human capital theory tell us only part of the story and do not always lead us to ask the right questions. Higher education as a vehicle for social transformation is not simply about acquisition of skills and credentials that accrue to the benefit of the individual. Institutions of higher education as collective entities build social, cultural, economic and political capital of benefit to their communities and regions (Watson et al 2011).

SHAPING A MORE AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT AGENDA

Universities have a new imperative to shape the future. We need to heed the advice of Bruno Latour, even if the military metaphor does not sit easily:

To remain in the metaphorical atmosphere of the time, military experts constantly revise their strategic doctrines, their contingency plans, the size, direction and technology of their projectiles, their smart bombs, their missiles; I wonder why we, why we alone would be saved from those sorts of revisions. It does not seem to me that we have been as

quick in academia, to prepare ourselves for new threats, new dangers, new tasks, new targets. Are we not like those mechanical toys that endlessly make the same gesture when everything else has changed around them? Would it not be terrible if we were training young kids— yes, young recruits, young cadets—for wars that are no longer possible, fighting enemies long gone, conquering territories that no longer exist, leaving them ill-equipped in the face of threats we had not anticipated, for which we are so thoroughly unprepared?

(2012:225)

Latour is not referring to the shallow template led exercises that institutional strategic planning often becomes. He is asking us to rethink purpose. In a post-truth era meaningful engagement based on mutual trust and clear signalling of who we are and what we represent, even if that is complex and contradictory, is critical. We must make it clear that it is our intention, as engaged institutions, to serve the public good, even if we are also, as one dimension of our role, engaged in commercial activity.

Anna Yeatman (2015) reminds us that:

Neoliberal thinking rejects the political arts, and instead embraces technologies of quantification. Such thinking dispenses with a sense of history or place. It is given to a mathematical matrix of living in the now. There can be no prudential consideration of the consequences and implications of conduct for the future wellbeing of individuals, their families and communities.

(2015:30)

To regain credibility and to ensure that our conduct is prudent there is a new imperative to pay attention to place based interaction and the knowledge generated through social and political history even though there are many pressures to do otherwise—How do we do what we do and whose knowledge, skills and services do we value? We need to reinforce the importance of our role as sites of diversity and link the role of that diversity with our capacity to innovate.

We need to ensure that our students are part of our engagement, which demands innovation to ensure we are inclusive of those who are not on campus and may be part of a geographically dispersed on-line community. We need to recognise the value of their prior knowledge and experience. We need a new scholarship of engagement cognisant of our changed students' relationship with us and the competing demands in their lives.

We must increasingly operate as global enterprises but we should ensure that we take our communities along on that global, multi-cultural journey. We need to generate mutual enthusiasm for new opportunities; understanding of what our international students and partnerships bring to us and the rich legacy they may leave; and understanding of how we can positively contribute globally—benefits that will invariably be most apparent in the longer term.

We should value our institutional longevity but also ensure that that longevity does not just attach to buildings and campus infrastructure. Engaged staff and students are our most valuable resource and they need the time and support for relationship building, relationship maintenance and translation of knowledge into forms that are meaningful for a wider range of audiences. Staff also need time to engage in the reflection and review necessary to 'revise their strategic doctrines' in tandem with relevant professional accrediting organisations that have a significant investment in maintaining the status quo.

Just as there is a looming imperative for the broader society to question the impact of neo-liberal policy, we should critically examine the impact of neo-liberal framing of higher education policy, which has been mediated by equity and access agendas, but which is potentially entrenching a highly stratified sector that offers very different outcomes for students, depending on their individual circumstance and geographic location.

We should commit to ensuring that engagement is at the centre of reframed and inclusive innovation agendas. To do otherwise in a post-truth world, we now know means we leave communities behind and their disenfranchisement has the potential to prevent major challenges being addressed and important and inclusive social policies realised.

Above all we need to address 'the fallen status of our collective search for truth'. We need to interrogate the foundations of our epistemology and the language we use to communicate and disseminate knowledge. We need to be on 'transmit as well as receive' but we will have to work to develop relationships of trust if we are to do that effectively and credibly. To again draw on Anna Yeatman's wisdom:

When conduct is oriented in terms of market principles it becomes instrumental: everything, the earth, things, other creatures and human beings themselves are valued only so far as they can be turned into means of producing profit. We are sleepwalking toward catastrophe unless we are able to rethink this way of thinking and the way of being it informs.

(2015:6)

Re-imagined engagement has the potential to provide a framework for universities and communities to dramatically change their 'ways of being' to ensure that we meet the challenge of positively influencing 'how our era will be described'.

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(Endnotes)

1. Our German colleagues also select an 'un-word' of the year. For 2016 this was Volksverräter(in) traitor of the people which has strong Nazi connotations http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38571487

2. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016

3. The Conversation, 20 January, 2017, https://theconversation.com/scientists-have-a-word-for-studying-the-post-truth-world-agnotology-71542

4. For an excellent discussion and critique of Gibbons et al (1994) see Wheelahan (2014) http://www.lhmartininstitute.edu.au/documents/publications/2014wheelahanbabies-and-bathwater-revaluing-the-role-of-the-academy-in-knowledge.pdf

5. Latour (2004) even identifies artificially maintained scientific uncertainty as a 'brownlash', expressing his concern that he 'intended to emancipate the public from prematurely naturalized objective facts' but fears he may have been 'foolishly mistaken'. (2014:226-227)

6. Referenced in Hanlon, G. (2016) 'The First Neo-Liberal Science: Management and Neo-Liberalism', Sociology, 1-18

7. https://www.nobelprize.org/ceremonies/archive/speeches/opening-2016.html

8. A crude estimation of the impact of the funding suggests that, for every £1 of HEIF invested, it returned £6 in gross additional KE income (2003-2010) PACEC (2012) Strengthening the Contribution of English Higher Education Institutions to the Innovation System: Knowledge Exchange and HEIF Funding, iv-v.

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10. Hare, J. (2015) 'Vice chancellors' salary packages on the rise' Higher Education Supplement, The Australian, 10 June 2015; Hare, J. (2016) 'Michael Spence and Greg Craven to vice-chancellor pay rises', Higher Education Supplement, The Australian, 31 August 2016.

11. This section of the paper has been developed from a paper presented at the The 12th Annual Higher Education Summit, Adelaide, 20-21 May 2014.

12. Dodd, T. (2017) 'Uberversity – tertiary education faces another shake-up from digital disruption', Australian Financial Review, 6 January 2017, http://www.afr.com/leadership/uberversity--tertiary-education-faces-another-shakeup-from-digital-disruption-20161221-gtfuui

13. Problem oriented, cross-disciplinary applied research that is 'more socially accountable and reflexive' (Gibbons 1997: 3)

14. http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/research/projects/delphi/general-resources/academic-publications/

15. Interestingly Marginson (2016) does not discuss the regional impact of universities in terms of their contribution to the 'common good'. This impact has profound economic, social and cultural dimensions. See Watson et al 2011.

16. The concept of the 'gig economy' in higher education referred to here was explored in Bell, S. (2016) 'The gig economy is no way for scientists to live', Higher Education Supplement, The Australian, 17 February 2016.