

TRANSFORM

IS IT THE ECONOMY STUPID ... OR IS IT CULTURE, IDENTITY AND SHARING THE VISION?



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INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR MARGARET GARDNER AO



Professor Margaret Gardner AO became President and Vice-Chancellor of Monash University on September 1, 2014.

Prior to joining Monash, Professor Gardner was Vice-Chancellor and President of RMIT from April 2005 until August 2014. She has extensive academic experience, having held various leadership positions in Australian universities throughout her career, including at the University of Queensland and Griffith University. Armed with a first class honours degree in Economics and a PhD from the University of Sydney, in 1988 she was a Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellow spending time at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell University, and the University of California, Berkeley. Professor Gardner was appointed Chair of Universities Australia in 2017 and she is a Director of the Group of Eight Universities. She is also a Director of Infrastructure Victoria and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG),

and was recently made a member of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Inclusion and Diversity Committee. Professor Gardner has previously been chair of Museum Victoria and chaired the Strategic Advisory Committee and the Expert Panel of the Office of Learning and Teaching (Federal Government Department of Education and Training). She has also been a member of various other boards and committees, including the Australian-American Fulbright Commission, the ANZAC Centenary Advisory Board and the International Education Advisory Committee, which led to the Chaney Report. In 2007, Professor Gardner was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in recognition of service to tertiary education, particularly in the areas of university governance and gender equity, and to industrial relations in Queensland.

1

HOW SHOULD WE RE-IMAGINE THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY?

Australia's economic prosperity in the

21st Century ultimately depends on how successfully it advances a culture of innovation. Universities, as engines of innovation and knowledge translation, are core to this enterprise. But while they contribute the vast array of advances in these areas, universities' contributions are often invisible to those not closely involved in them.

Today's environment demands more than ever universities that are capable of sharing their vision with others to help ensure that those ambitions are realised. They must be capable of meeting the demanding cultural challenges that are inherent in communicating and advancing our education, research and innovation endeavours to the public and industry. To do this, we must ground universities in public engagement as anchors and magnets for the exchange of ideas and expertise; incubating and accelerating innovations; supporting start-ups and stimulating local industry, and exploring and articulating the challenges facing our communities from many perspectives, economic, social, scientific and technological.

2

YOU HAVE MENTIONED THAT UNIVERSITIES NEED TO BE PRECISE ABOUT DEFINING THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE THROUGH THEIR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH. COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THIS?

Australia's industry structure is different from the major economic blocs where other world-class research institutions and major industry research collaborations are based. Our universities therefore

face challenges of scale, population and location that affect how they are able to engage with industry and partners. Engagement of the depth and kind to which we aspire for international impact often requires decisions to be made from overseas and the relevant industry engagement community to be international or global rather than local. To be successful, Australian universities must be capable of demonstrating their capability for adding value to industry partners above and beyond what other universities closer to that head office can provide.

Conversely, the local community around a campus is also important. The impact of the university on the immediate precinct in offering amenities cultural and sporting enhancing local environments; Engagement with and contributions to the key community issues, whether health, education or environmental; Attraction and encouragement of the local economy are important but different sets of engagement.

3 **WE ARE ENTERING THE 'ANTHROPOCENE' (NO LONGER A PASSIVE, STABLE AND CLEMENT WORLD) ERA...IT IS A FRACTIOUS, CHAOTIC AND UNPREDICTABLE WORLD NOW. HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN RELATION TO ENGAGEMENT IN THIS UNKNOWN AND DANGEROUS WORLD?**

In recent years we have witnessed a surge in the prominence of false claims, fake news, flawed predictions and faux-

solutions in our media. This has coincided with a rise in populism where expertise and evidence-based reasoning are cast as elitist and obfusatory rather than as vehicles for advancing the public good. The public arena is a contested, fragmented and distracting space but also a space where the populist 'game' is to deny the arena the full spectrum of ideas and the full range of debate by making all opinion equally valid.

These developments have occurred amid a backdrop of global challenges ranging across climate change and issues of national security to workforce disruption caused by automation. In this context the task of scholars to engage with the broader public and the role of universities to advance solutions that deliver real benefit to the community have become more important than ever.

4 **MIGRANCY AND POPULATION MOVEMENTS ARE UNSETTLING VAST SWATHES OF THE DEVELOPED WORLD, AS WELL AS MANY PARTS OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD ... HOW SHOULD UNIVERSITIES RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES THIS PRESENTS?**

National borders are irrelevant to the free exchange of ideas that is vital to education and research, and the internationalisation of both these elements is fundamental to Australian universities' reputation for excellence. Our higher education sector this year welcomed more than 300,000 international students from over 190 countries, making up some 26% of university students in Australia.

The deepening of discord around matters

of immigration, border security and national sovereignty over the past year or two threatens to corrode the tolerance on which greater understanding and engagement are built. Brexit and Trump may be the most obvious examples, but these issues have resonance that extends well beyond the United Kingdom and the United States, with anti-immigrant sentiment energising political groups in continental Europe as well as the re-emergence of such views in Australia. However, we also know from longitudinal research conducted by Monash that multiculturalism and immigration are accepted by the overwhelming majority of Australians as a benefit. There are opportunities for Australian universities to attract talent from universities in the US, the UK and other nations who share our commitment to the free exchange of information and recognise that the environment in Australia might be more attractive than the climate they are currently working within.

5 **DOES THE VOLATILITY OF POLITICAL OPINIONS WHICH ARE CURRENT IN THE USA, IN EUROPE, IN THE UK, IN ASIA AND IN AUSTRALIA IMPACT ON OUR CAPACITY TO PROVIDE CONTINUITY AND STABILITY?**

A consistent, long-term government vision and plan for education and research is fundamental to creating a healthy, world class and sustainable tertiary education sector. In recent years such a vision has been less than prominent, and budget priorities, when announced, have seemed, at times, at odds with Australia's

innovation agenda and the importance of growing our knowledge industry. These factors make it difficult for Australian universities to plan long term in the way that is needed for a healthy, world class and sustainable tertiary education sector vital to Australia's economic future.

At the international level, the Executive Order announced earlier this year by US President Donald Trump, which restricted citizens of various countries from entering the United States, provoked doubt about the ability of some of Australia's most talented researchers, students and staff to engage with their peers in the United States. Academic activities of Monash University were certainly affected by that Executive Order, as they were for other universities in Australia.

6

IS THE UNIVERSITY'S ROLE STILL ONE OF CREATING CULTURAL CAPITAL AND TRANSMITTING THE BEST OF WHAT HAS BEEN THOUGHT AND SAID, OR ARE WE IN AN ERA OF STRICTLY VOCATIONAL LEARNING AND ACCREDITATION?

Those two alternatives are not exclusive, and nor are do they encompass every purpose that a university fulfils. Universities are diverse, and universities will occupy and serve different communities and different missions. Part of our role as modern universities is to help solve the great challenges of the age, to help inform the big debates and evaluate the big decisions, with the clearest logic and the most reliable evidence available. Solutions to those challenges do not spring fully formed into implementation once they are recognised. The definition of a problem,

the recognition of its solution and the acceptance of solutions are all matters that require engagement – with communities, with government and with industry. And at times that engagement means “speaking truth to power” by contesting the views or criticising the decisions of leaders and policy makers, where these fall short. It is not always comfortable, but it is an essential feature of the public good role of universities in Western democracies.

7

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE AN AUTHENTIC VARIETY OF UNIVERSITY MISSIONS WITHIN CONDITIONS WHICH DEMAND CONFORMITY?

While the scale of Australian universities may have become more standardised since the unified higher education system was introduced under the Dawkins reforms in the 1980s, the character and mission of a university is always driven foremost by the particulars of its own history, its own community (including how it engages with alumni) and its location. Many of the disciplines for which Monash is regarded most highly – for example, materials science, biomedical innovation and pharmaceutical sciences – are augmented by the University's proximity through its different campuses to other organisations or industries that have demonstrated expertise in those areas.

Universities have also diversified greatly in recent decades through their different approaches to international engagement. Where Monash has established multiple campuses offshore other universities maintain a single campus presence in the location that they were first established.

Similarly, some universities have sought more than others to focus on growing and diversifying their international student cohort. At Monash University, for example, 26% of students come from a country other than Australia; this is considerably higher than a great many other universities, particularly regional universities where the international cohort is generally smaller as a proportion of the student population, and where the university's mission is likely to be tied more directly to the interests of the region in which it is based.

8

WHAT ARE THE FRAMEWORKS UNIVERSITIES SHOULD CONSIDER FOR BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND HOW DO THESE FRAMEWORKS ANCHOR WITH PLACE-BASED STRATEGIES?

Engagement of the magnitude and depth to which Australian universities aspire can only be advanced through a combination of endeavours:

It requires the development and implementation of public policies and initiatives that facilitate engagement between research and industry, such as the R&D Tax Incentive, as well as long-term certainty around research and education funding.

It requires continued support and advocacy of existing collaborative programs – for example the Cooperative Research Centres, which have proven so successful that they have been emulated by other nations.

Lastly, it requires investing more deeply

in ecosystems where industry, universities and research institutes are co-located in the same precinct, drawn together by similar interests and strengths. The benefits of clustering industry and research expertise to drive innovation and entrepreneurialism have already been demonstrated in many areas overseas, as evidenced by Palo Alto in California, the Kennispark Twente in the Netherlands and Warwick Manufacturing Group in the UK. The growing prominence of similar clusters in Australia through locations such as the Monash Clayton Innovation Cluster and the Parkville Biomedical Precinct represents a significant step by our universities towards demonstrating their capability for adding value to industry partners and attracting international investment.

9

HOW SHOULD WE COMMUNICATE OUR ENGAGEMENT STORIES MORE EFFECTIVELY TO THE PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT?

Perhaps we should start by acknowledging a tendency among some of those involved in research and education to assume that the importance of their endeavours should be self-evident to the public. It is not. That importance will only be recognised when

we also have advocacy and appreciation for education and knowledge generation supported by others in government, industry and community.

Australia's universities must do better to promote the benefits of such engagement, which permeate every sphere, encompassing the social and cultural as well as the economic. We need to work to reframe the public's and governments' thinking about what universities do, to recognise that universities are engines of innovation and catalysts for the advancement of 21st century knowledge economies. How many members of the public or government know that start-ups are the largest contributor to job creation in Australia, and that more than four in five Australian start-up founders are university graduates? How many business owners know that enterprises that engage with researchers on innovation are three times more likely to improve productivity, exporting activity and sales?

Universities must also learn from others who have demonstrated real success in engaging with the public and government.

10

YOU HAVE COMMENTED THAT UNIVERSITIES ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF IDEAS. HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS NEED TO BE THINKING ABOUT IDEAS BEYOND THE HORIZON – NOT JUST THE NEXT BIG IDEA, BUT THE ONE AFTER THAT. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE NEXT BUT ONE BIG IDEA IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

In recent years considerable focus has been directed at the trend in higher education toward digital learning and the flipped classroom. I feel less attention has been directed at the careers of the future and the changing nature of work, and what this means for the kinds of education, training and accreditation we must provide to our students. Today's generation of students upon graduating need the capabilities to be flexible and adaptive in responding to change. How do we best prepare them for this environment, and to what extent does the bachelor system of undergraduate education that is currently so widespread meet this purpose?

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