INTRODUCTION
– RE-IMAGINING THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

In a world of turbulence and uncertainty there is always a need to know exactly where the leading edge of change, driving university’s engagement with society, lies.

Re-imagining the Engaged University takes us up to the leading edge of change, providing a platform for dialogue and debate about how progressive and leading universities are revisiting the strategic imperative for them to be relevant and add value to the communities they serve.

In Issue 1 of Transform Professor Sharon Bell challenged us to ‘re-imagine’ what it means to be an engaged university in a ‘post-truth era’ with disenchantment from decades of neo-liberal market driven change as a basis for university growth and expansion. Issue 2 embraces this challenge, identifying and solidifying the key issues shirt-fronting the next generation of engaged scholars and institutions. Eminent contributors to this Issue seek to re-imagine and re-think in some important ways what our universities are for – daring to break historically held engagement boundaries with a vengeance, based on their hard-won insights gained over many years of effort and intellectual and managerial struggle.

Professor Margaret Gardner AO, President and Vice Chancellor of Monash University and Chair of Universities Australia gives her first major interview on the challenges and opportunities of engagement for Australian universities. Professor Tim Brailsford, Vice Chancellor and President at Bond University provides fresh insight into the importance of reshaping relationships with government, industry and community but also cautions us to tread carefully to avoid potential landmines. And Professor Barbara Holland, internationally renowned for her scholarship and expertise in the institutionalization of engagement, takes stock to look forward to a new emergent era of public appreciation and support where community engagement will be the key issue for university reputation.

In direct response to feedback received from readers of Issue 1, this edition features shorter opinion pieces, interviews and viewpoints, reflecting leading edge case studies in text and pictures, portraying practical and innovative models of engagement from institutions such as Western Sydney University, The University of Canterbury, Flinders University and HE industry partner CSIRO. In so doing, it seeks to give voice to the sector’s counsel...
of youth as well as our council of elders, in a clear and concise as well as imaginative manner, about how we are building upon the shoulders of those that have gone before in an effort to re-purpose publicly spirited universities in the modern era.

UNIVERSITIES ARE PARAMOUNT ORGANISATIONS for producing knowledge, and in doing so they can be expected to produce knowledge about themselves. They should therefore be ‘learning organisations’ which are reflexive and self-critical. They should be prepared to understand themselves as ‘cognitive subjects’ who can criticise and explain and evaluate the origins of their own beliefs and knowledge. In so far as they claim to do this, universities can lay claim to being the source and repository of critical thinking.

Secondly, we are not sufficiently clear about what we mean by ‘engagement’ itself. There is ambiguity and potential confusion to be cleared away as we proceed to clarity. Holland provides definitive clarity on this issue in our opening article and Hore tests this definition giving voice to the clamour from industry that universities need to do more to maximise the engagement of their world class research systems with the end users - targeting both large and medium sized enterprises with relevant outcomes.

There are some good examples where this is happening, such as the MARCS BabyLab at WSU (highlighted in this Issue’s pictorial essay) where the transfer of their world class knowledge dramatically assists reading and speech abilities in infants and young children.

Thirdly, we need to be clear about the ‘horizon of relevance’ and the ‘axis of proximity’ as highlighted by the article on re-imagining engagement as a ‘cultural project.’ These twin concepts refer to internet-led changes that are proving to be significant in shaping the possibilities of action and learning in contemporary communities. Such a brave new world is increasingly being seen as one that has the potential for both liberation and oppression, inherent in the digitalisation, atomisation and roboticisation of industrial capacity and of our social life.

Fourthly, we need a conceptual map that stands the test of ‘criticality’ itself. It must be valid in defining the kind of learning and epistemology that we can use to change our situation. It must be transformative and facilitate an agenda for change. We may need to accept the idea that ‘expert knowledge’ must sometimes be challenged by knowledgeable subjects who possess few formal qualifications. For universities authentically seeking to re-find their way by fostering ‘transcending learning experiences’ for their academic community, Billy O’Steen provides a compelling case study from across the Tasman on how his University has managed to mobilise a Student Volunteer Army on a massive scale through curriculum innovation to help re-build Christchurch. With more than one million students in Australia today, O’Steen provides a conceptual map of what could be possible, should we dare to re-imagine engagement in terms of innovative curriculum design on a mass scale.

These four themes addressed in this issue should then enable us to approach conceptual models of ‘impact’ and ‘critical...
thinking’ as a set of intellectual skills which can help us understand, engage and change the problems we encounter as learners and teachers. They should allow us the opportunity to develop a critical curriculum with impact, regardless of the level or subject discipline through which we learn, study and research.

The content of this Issue begins the debate on the way forward as seen by the eminent contributors, though it is not definitive. Transform is starting some new debates; however, the editors are keenly aware that the contributors are offering their hard-won insights gained over many years of effort and intellectual and managerial struggle. In establishing intellectual coherence with some serious sense of continuity of theme and debate, the Journal seeks to build on this scene-setting with a clear sense of vision in addressing sector needs. The editors welcome views and perspectives of leaders of change and institutional renewal at both national and international levels. There is a reality of high level policy management and development of universities as major players in social and economic matters. These are crucial national, regional and local concerns and big money is involved and large numbers of people who are studying, teaching and operating some of the largest and most capital intensive organisations in the country. However, the Journal is very conscious of the social needs, and indeed the emotional needs, of millions of people who want and need education for a life that can be fulfilling and challenging. It is conscious that these sometimes contrasting aims are not immediately reconcilable - access to learning has been and continues to be contested; it continues to be monetised and marketised and it remains in thrall to government policy directives and is thus politically challenged.

The emerging task then for Transform is to identify and ‘thematisate’, to solidify and put flesh on the bones for the key issues for the next generation of engaged scholars and institutions. The first two issues have begun this work and we can identify, or in some cases have already identified, an indicative taxonomy to be addressed, not a fixed agenda, rather a way of clustering issues and themes, including:

**CONTEXTS (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS)**

- Value for money for students and for the tax-payer; economic benefits for students and personal benefits that accrue.
- The character of the competitive marketplace; flexible ways of learning and teaching; the regulatory environment and need for ‘quality’.
- Funding and fee issues; costs of graduation and student debt; graduate outcomes.
- Including recruitment and student retention.
- Positioning in league tables and rankings; the need for alternative rankings around meaningful engagement.
- Outcomes for students in terms of employment and future life chances; lifelong learning as both instrumentalism and as a value in its own right.
- Research both as a form of impact and engagement and in relation to learning and teaching for a social purpose.

**CONTENT FOR ENGAGEMENT**

- We always need to ask what is the university for? (Is it really to provide academics and administrators with work?).
- What kind of people do we want to emerge from universities? And how should universities respond to this formation challenge?
- How can we re-conceptualise the ideas of place and location and community for the engaged university? Can we go meaningfully beyond the ritual obeisance to the ancestors?
- Learning is about the potential for doing things differently and better; it is about change and transformation; change can be regressive though and we need to address this, not appease it.
- Knowledge always has the power to challenge the status quo and to hold people to account in democratic ways; the engaged university is a democratic and open institution by definition - but it must live up to the claim.
- Knowledge is not universally popular but it must be scientifically based and accountable. Learners and teachers must be free to challenge all beliefs in open dialogue and discourse.
- Engagement should be about learning for a social result and is the means by which universities are accountable to the people.

The purpose of Transform is to provide a space for critical enquiry, reflection and review across the breadth of the engagement agenda in higher education. We need to re-imagine and re-think in some important ways what our universities
are for. Issue 1 published some views on the ‘big issues’ that tend to get ignored when university strategies are being discussed in academic boards. This debate has been taken further and deeper now in Issue 2. For the future (Issues 3 and 4) Transform will explore ‘Impact’ and the related theme of ‘critical thinking’, reporting on how to do ‘engagement’ successfully and celebrating the best that has been done. There can be no ducking the matter of CONTENT for engaged universities serious about impact - and such content cannot be just another strategy paper. It should have material outcomes and effects and give expression to what we are about as educators. It should explore just what is learned and taught as engaged scholarship and examine the place of critical thinking in this. The editors would welcome contributions from readers to this thorny theme of ‘Impact’ as well as other substantive issues. Our starting point here is to re-imagine where the leading edge of change, driving universities impact with society, might lie.