| EDITORIAL

THE UNIVERSITY'S SOCIAL AND CIVIC ROLE: A WAY FORWARD FOR AN ENGAGED UNIVERSITY?

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The range, scope and reach of this edition is remarkable and the journal is hopefully evolving into a compendium and rich resource for those whose concerns lie in the burgeoning field of 'university engagement.' We are laying down markers here for contemporary workers in the fields of learning, teaching and research and creating an intellectual resource for all of those who want to take forward the critical examination of higher learning and scholarship in a world in which knowledge is exploding into availability. We are also making a mark for the future as we are forced to examine the deeply embedded assumptions and values of universities.

The range of themes in this issue has an incipient focus and underlying thread of argument. It concerns the emerging global world in which universities are expected to understand the role of culture in civic and democratic life and to extend this to all those who seek to benefit from it. As Bell points out in this, her third article in a triptych for Transform, in re-shaping the university as an 'anchor' institution, we both reflect and create our culture under conditions of conflict and contestatation. Global demands mean managing the interaction and relations between industry, governments and learning institutions themselves - in a competitive economy that no single person or institution controls. If universities are the industry of today they are still contested places and spaces. In themselves as it were, sui-generis, universities are not solutions. Bell highlights the importance of 'place' as universities play an increasingly crucial role in shaping cities and regions in a climate of 'toxicity'. Of course geography and location can play a decisive and formative role in just how civic a university can be and universities have come to be decisive shapers of local, regional and national cultures and economies and have developed a responsive diversity in many cases.

Calma reminds us that after 169 years of the birth of Australia's higher education sector, there is still unfinished business for universities to 'decolonise' our education

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system and create a sense of place and space that truly reflects our nation's First Peoples historical and cultural perspectives. He challenges us to re-imagine a world where every Australian university student benefits from the expertise and ingenuity of the world's oldest living cultures. Similarly, Ewen's piece asserts how we must reframe our understanding of civic engagement between universities and Indigenous peoples if we are to 'learn all they have to teach us,' describing the University of Melbourne's 'adapting academy' as a useful case study that reflects the rich mix of tradition and a resilient and vibrant living culture. There are many ways for universities to respond to this challenge for future civic and democratic engagement and our next edition, themed *Australia's First Peoples,* will address the need to place First People's homeland, language and culture centrally at the heart of the educational experience.

Some of the related problems and contested arenas are indicated in the article by Harkavy and Bergan who explain in detail the democratic mission of universities and assert that democracy requires the participation of its citizens. They argue for the relevance of 'multi-perspectivity' and for tolerance in which universities are practitioners of engagement and freedom as well as just espousing their virtues and values. Without action and agency it seems clear that intended outcomes can be at risk especially in an era where national populism stalks the corridors of power in democratic parliaments. The practice of democracy must start at the level of the individual who is a 'self', with consciousness and agency, no-matter how constraining the social conditions in which we live. It is one of the functions of a university in a democratic society to uphold such a stance as a foundation stone of social justice.

Professor Richard Teare appears in the journal to argue the case for his vision of a Global University for Lifelong Learning for those who truly need access to higher learning. The poor, the dispossessed and the excluded have been the focus of his globally focused yet locally delivered outreach. In such a pioneering and inspirational approach we can see the lineaments of learning and education as a lived form of social justice. And it is a model which brings into concordance the building of viable communities and the power of the internet to deliver access to knowledge and information. Perhaps it is a model for us all to consider as we seek to translate our thinking into practical outcomes? If it shows us what is possible on a slim resource base, how might the mighty global university knowledge factories deliver a truly democratic outcome to transform lives amongst the most needy?

Engaging with democracy is the next big idea for modern civic universities and the cornerstone for the making of city regions. Two major developments that seek to address this engagement agenda through internationally accepted metrics are reported on in this issue. Professor Mathew Johnson, Executive Director of the Swearer Center from Brown University based in Providence, Rhode Island, recently visited Australia to meet with the 10 universities participating in the Australian pilot of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. Johnson provides background to this major global project that is currently underway in his article focusing on the internationalisation of the Carnegie Community Classification system and Firth updates us on Australia's progress on this pilot program.

The second major project taking place concerns the development of global rankings for engagement. Wells reports on

the global engagement rankings project that is underway and is being led by three universities across three continents – King's College London, University of Chicago and University of Melbourne. Their work addresses how change could be supported across the global sector to begin to communicate a new story about university value - based on new and critical measures of civic engagement in global rankings.

If the university's role in civic society is one of critique and renewal through engagement then it must be engaged in the current issues and disputations of the day. Our civic culture is increasingly based on communication and information and this new world of informational and surveillance existence requires diversity and consensus and vigilance; it requires a culture of change which is moderated and understood by those who benefit and those who suffer because of it. Currently there is much evidence to show the obverse of this. Harkavy and Bergan argue that we are living in times when democracy is flawed and weakened by the collapse of trust in our political processes and institutions. Many people no longer believe they can influence the social and political decisions made on their behalf; many are becoming less supportive of governance. The lack of trust and faith in civic institutions and life is rooted not only in those who have suffered marginalisation from the mainstream such as the First Peoples as highlighted by Calma and Ewen. We cannot, for example, afford to ignore the disputatious argument that rising ethnic diversity may in the long run reduce trust and solidarity amongst a majority of citizens if it is not addressed and confronted in ways which win consent. We cannot assume that multi-culturalism can unproblematically and automatically win the support of all the people in a community. We must take seriously the

point that people who live in more diverse neighbourhoods or who lack interaction with different social and ethnic/cultural groups may withdraw from civic life and become less trusting of others. This would of course weaken further the civic culture we are seeking to enhance.

Our view is that there are key themes and issues that need the academy to be a genuine forum for debate and dispute and to engage with the wider world. Universities must therefore incorporate an active dimension to their missions and strategies. The elements of this approach are we suggest: the re-shaping of the role of public educator so that public knowledge fits the emerging concerns as part of the mainstream university curriculum; the adoption of critical thinking strategies and programs for all learners so that genuine knowledge can be created in

practice; knowledge skills and what counts as knowledge itself needs to be revised especially in respect of marginalised and alienated communities; attentionality, reflection and awareness need to be placed more centrally in the learning experience of students and applied to the changing and threatening world of digital and surveillance capitalism; and we need to 'do' critical thinking and dialogue which transforms both what we study and the way we study. The object of learning which is the world out there as well as the internal and imaginative life of individuals and groups, and the learner as a thinking subject need to be brought into conjunction. It is in the relation of both object and subject of study that our claim to critical thinking and understanding lies. The university as an open forum for debate and discourse has always to be re-constructed. Knowing the

world is an achievement but changing it and demonstrating a capacity to engage is the real question to be asked. Knowing the real world cannot be done entirely within the university and neither should it. It has to be done by engagement.

Though this edition has a wide ranging thematic focus, it is by no means fully comprehensive. Our future editions will, we anticipate, explore the great challenges of change alluded to in this edition but which still await fuller and detailed treatment.

Social justice, race and ethnicity, the impending crisis of planetary climate change and the role of universities in respect of the Australian Indigenous people and the evolving national culture are all thematically relevant to our key purposes - the use of learning for an improved and democratic result and for a fully engaged university.