

# First Australian Summit on the Integration of Research Teaching and Learning

## Communiqué

The first Australian summit on the integration of research teaching and learning has emphasised the vital importance of research experiences for undergraduates.

The summit, organised by Professor Angela Brew as part of her fellowship with the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, was attended by academic leaders from across Australia and also included experts from the US and the UK. The purpose of this Communiqué is to highlight the strategic importance of integrating research and teaching for all Australian universities and of connecting undergraduate students with research.

Australia needs creative ideas and a research-minded population to become an innovative knowledge society. Further, the undergraduate experience is arguably the most important in shaping the future career trajectories of students. A critical part of this experience is the vital connection between teaching and research.

If, as the Commonwealth's report *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* states, the Federal Government's aim is to 'drive improvements in productivity and create a smarter, cleaner and more competitive economic future for Australia', higher education must teach all students, not just research students, how to engage as much in the production of knowledge as in its acquisition. All students should be immersed in an environment where their learning is based on the most recent research findings. This should occur as early as possible in their undergraduate careers and learning should be underpinned by research experiences.

Engaging undergraduate students in research and inquiry contributes to strengthening world class research and is in line with best practice in other countries. It provides a way for higher education to address the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce through developing important graduate attributes, including the skills of critical enquiry, noted by the Bradley Review Report as being important to all Australian universities. It engages students' meaningfully in higher education and prepares them for a 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work in which knowing how to create, inquire and critically evaluate knowledge is of increasing importance.

It goes to the heart of our future competitiveness as an innovative country, is critical to retention of the brightest and best students, and to reversing the alarming decline of Australian students entering PhD programs.

To achieve this, changes are required to the ways in which funding agencies within the higher education sector interact. It is important that DEEWR, the Australian Research Council (ARC), the National Health & Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) and the Australian Learning & Teaching Council (ALTC), work together to foster an environment where the connection between teaching and research is valued. To this end, ARC and NH&MRC grants should, as a matter of urgency, have a mandate to require research outcomes to feed into education at all levels. This approach would in some ways parallel the approach of the US National Science Foundation (NSF), which requires that all proposals for research awards identify not only the intellectual merit of the project but also its potential for broader societal impact. The broader impact requirement is often met by educational efforts related to the content of the research. The NSF also provides supplements to its awardees to enable them to incorporate undergraduate students among project personnel.

International best practice suggests that this is needed to drive an innovative and creative Australia, and that it is likely to be matched by improvements in the quality and quantity of world class research outcomes. Not only does this suggest a defining characteristic of our 'higher' education, it represents a significant opportunity for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency in ensuring and enhancing its quality and competitiveness.

The synergistic link between an educated workforce and economic development is undeniable. Exposing undergraduates to the vital link between teaching and research is one of the cornerstones on which a competitive Australia will be nurtured. If we fail to embolden our students to be creative, the future of Australia in 2020 and beyond, when our natural resources inevitably decline, will be bleak. It is vital that we now connect undergraduate students with research clearly and explicitly, to enable Australia to be a genuinely innovative knowledge society.

Prepared by Professor Angela Brew, ALTC National Teaching Fellow, Macquarie University, in collaboration with delegates at the First Australian Summit on the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning.