HR Benchmarking Conference: A World of Change
31 October 2013

“The Evolving University”

Keynote Address by ECU Vice-Chancellor
Professor Kerry Cox
Universities are enduring institutions....

- a thousand years in the western world
Functions of a University

- **Knowledge** – teach, preserve, apply
- **Research** – new knowledge, innovation
- **Serve and engage** students and communities
- **Museum** – preserve artefacts, language, culture
- **Moral authority** - promote ethical values, inclusiveness, fair-dealing
Academe:

one of the great religions of the world
In academe we prize:

- Originality
- Creativity
- Innovation

Leads to “academic freedom” which is the bête noire of line-management
As a species we are imperfect in our evolution (eg – greed; bullying; aggression)

In universities we value innovation, creativity, life of the mind, good ideas

There is a “separation of powers” between individual staff and groups of staff and, the governing group and VC (line management) - “academic freedom”

Because people are “free” to think creatively and innovatively, it does not follow that they are free of line accountability
“…..several of those learned societies have chosen to remain, ..... the sanctuaries in which exploded systems and obsolete prejudices found shelter and protection after they had been hunted out of every other corner of the world.”

The Wealth of Nations
Adam Smith, 1776
• In recent decades universities are being seen as saviours - but ..... 

...only if universities become more relevant to the wider world

• Very recently MOOCs are being seen as the panacea - a driver which will force universities to change
If universities could only get better at change then Universities and society will be better off, but...

More than 2,500 year ago Confucius said words to the effect ...

“They must often change who would be constant in happiness or wisdom”
In Australia, universities are diverse

• The emphasis will depend on various university priorities eg – teaching, research, services to improve inclusivity in society, wellbeing, prosperity, sustainability

• Moral authority – for the community....... (the Church has lost ground)
Across the world
universities are extremely diverse

This is also seen with respect to autonomy

eg – USA/Australia and (some) third world
countries
“Academic Freedom” yes! BUT...

- The expectation is that staff will treat people ethically, fairly, reasonably; they will not steal money or other people’s ideas; that they’ll park their cars according to the rules; .....  

- Because of academic freedom and the independence that individuals enjoy in thinking, as soon as a group forms there is likely to be some turbulence - especially if you are trying to settle or change priorities  

- Thus leadership required!!
Examples of Transgressions in Universities

- Travel rorts
- Stealing cash / resources
- Plagiarism
- Marks for sexual favours
- Nepotism (eg - family/friends into quota-restricted courses)
- Secretly adjusting cut-off scores/allocation bonuses to students who do not meet declared cut-off (BUT not reducing ATAR)
10 Rules for Ethical Leadership

1. Legitimacy – value-add!
2. Vision and Innovation - see a better future
3. Judgement - big issues first, not small/easy
4. Contextualise – from here to there, how?
5. Leadership Courage – right decision, not easy (hold the line)
6. Take risks – calculated!
7. Create Expectations – do not avert your gaze!
8. Reduce Triangulation
9. Work in Teams; Value All
10. Be Mentored; Mentor others; Have holidays; Have fun!
Purpose; Values; Priorities; Vision for ECU

Negotiated at all levels through many iterations
To further develop valued citizens for the benefit of Western Australia and beyond through teaching and research inspired by engagement and partnerships
• **Integrity**
  behaving ethically and pursuing rigorous intellectual positions

• **Respect**
  valuing individual differences and diversity

• **Rational Inquiry**
  motivated by evidence and reasoning

• **Personal Excellence**
  striving to realise potential
ECU: Strategic Priorities

1. To create positive outcomes in our communities through mutually beneficial engagement
2. To deliver accessible world-class education and an enriching student experience
3. To enhance the personal and professional outcomes of graduates
4. To strengthen research capability, capacity, translation and impact
5. To enhance organisational resilience, sustainability and reputation
Edith Cowan University: our Vision

For our students, staff and graduates to be highly regarded internationally as ethical and engaged contributors to more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous communities
Key Roles for HR Expertise

- Selecting staff
- Maintaining and enhancing performance of staff
- Supporting staff needs
- Creating a positive, fulfilling and rewarding working environment
- Facilitating academic staff promotions (those working consistently at a higher level)
- Helping to benchmark metrics
Staff Satisfaction Survey at ECU

- 2012: 1\textsuperscript{st} time staff survey benchmarked - Voice Project (against 37 universities in Australia and NZ)
- Highest response rate (78%) in past ten years
- Considerably higher levels of engagement and commitment to ECU than peers in other universities (Organisational Direction, Mission, Values, Environmental Responsibility, Safety Behaviour, Facilities)
- Best result reported (to 2012) amongst sector for career development and flexibility – both key for attraction and staff retention
- Exceeded average on all 44 benchmarked items
The value of benchmarking

This is not to say we do not need to improve – we certainly do!

Benchmarking also provides a reality check
Staff tell us where we can improve
Values are important

• Universities should have well defined values – preferably few, and should practise the values in their operations

• Do we test the values of the staff we are recruiting? (In my view we do not test values anywhere overtly enough – we concentrate on discipline expertise)
“Great Colleges to Work For” 2013 Survey

Colleges that have strong workplaces - support, consult with, and appreciate their employees.¹

Strong leadership, well-articulated collaborative-governance practices and a culture of recognition.

• HR services can be very value-adding

• HR is a service department – not the “ethics police” or “guardian of purity and standards” (in my view)

• The talent in HR is not exempt from the normal University protocols (eg - communication through line management)
Areas for improvement at ECU currently

- Staff selection – especially due diligence
- Provision of appropriate staff and organisational development – case studies better than theory
- Provision of metrics
- Staff survey of staff satisfaction/working conditions
- Facilitation of practices in line with the organisation’s values
- Performance management, particularly managing poor performance – do not avert your gaze (never finished)

\[2\text{ World-wide 70\% of PD is ineffective}\]
“I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught.”

“To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”

“There is nothing wrong with change, if it is in the right direction.”

Sir Winston Churchill
(1874-1965)
“They must often change who would be constant in happiness or wisdom.”

“Where you go..... ....there you are.”

Confucius
(551 BC- 479 BC)