

Report from the Universities Australia Conference

A large number of DASSH Board members and members recently attended Universities Australia's annual conference. The theme for 2014 was *Universities in the New Era: Stirred not Shaken* and the program provided the opportunity for dialogue, analysis and engagement between the sector, other stakeholders and commentators. The conference had a primary focus on accelerating developments in digital teaching and learning and innovation initiatives, with presentations on:

- MOOCs and online learning
- Digital developments from a student perspective
- Work-integrated learning
- How to utilise social media
- Developing a sustainable research culture; and
- Establishing links and generating funding through industry, philanthropy and business.

The conference dinner with the Hon. Christopher Pyne, Minister for Education held no surprises. He reaffirmed the government would reduce the regulatory burden imposed by TEQSA and continue to promote the New Colombo Plan as a priority. The introduction of the TEQSA Amendment Bill the next day reflected the government's approach to reshaping the regulatory environment.

The next day Shadow Minister for Education, Kim Carr, the Chief Scientist, Ian Chubb and the UK Minister for State of Universities and Science, the Rt Hon David Willetts MP gave interesting presentations. Carr reasserted his support for ASSH disciplines, stating his concern for them under the current government. Importantly, Willetts acknowledged that much of what was happening in the UK was based on Australian policy shifts, while Australian higher education policy has drawn on UK policy initiatives, like the research assessment exercises. His presence at the conference and subsequent meetings with the Federal Government means that as a sector we need to carefully watch and understand UK developments. Ian Chubb highlighted that our science research performance was in decline and that we needed to have honest conversation about what it takes to have genuine world-class research. What he failed to highlight was the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly with the ASSH disciplines, as the basis of future innovation.

What was disappointing about the UA conference was the little attention paid to the ASSH sector, which was largely absent from the program. DASSH will work with UA to aim to rectify this their future conferences. The full text of the Minister for Education's speech is available at <http://www.pyneonline.com.au/media/speeches-media/address-to-the-universities-australia-conference-dinner>