

CAMPUS MORNING MAIL

Hard facts and insider analysis

From Stephen Matchett



What vice chancellors want, simpler staff agreements, more flexible workforces and did they mention money?

As university managements in Western Australia signal a much tougher enterprise bargaining approach than previous consultants Lee Hecht Harrison have talked to university managements, including “high-profile progressive vice chancellors,” on how to build on the Australian Higher Education Association’s blueprint for change, released a year back ([CMM](#) February 4 2016). The report also includes acres of consultant-copy on leadership, industry engagement and opportunities among other issues but for university staff wondering what management wants it is the **emphasis on workplace change** that is especially interesting. The report is circulating among university management’s now.

Who talked: Strangely the “high-profile” VCs are not so lofty as to be named in the report but LHH does report it variously talked to VCs, DVCs and HR directors from **Group of Eight** and what it calls **regional and technology universities**. However, it lists contacts with; **Australian Catholic U, Charles Sturt U, Edith Cowan U, Flinders U, LaTrobe U, Macquarie U, UniNewcastle, QUT, UNSW, Swinburne, UniWollongong, UniAuckland and Western Sydney U.**

The big issue: Is what it always is; underfunding, absence of resources, incomplete cash – and did they tell you how they can’t continue without more money. “We must find a mechanism that **increases the unit of research investment** and the **funding per student**, we **simply must find more money** to keep delivering at a similar level of quality,” one VC is quoted as saying. Although one also suggested that **existing resources** are **not being well-spent** by **research agencies**; “When we look at CSIRO, ARC, NHMRC, ANSTO and pool all these resources we really need to ask the question [of] how this research funding is configured and if we are indeed obtaining the best value. My view is that we are not.”

What they want to do: What indeed, with a range of opinions that will have **AHEIA up and applauding**, people focused on **improving productivity**. “We need to have the **ability to manage our workforce** much more flexibly than we currently do. There are **rising expectations** on universities to do more with less, yet we often need to contend with **industrial agreements that are out of step** with the **modern demands** pertaining to **fiscal responsibilities, flexible delivery of education and the digitisation** of our sector,” a HR director said. And a VC **blamed enterprise agreements** for the **high use of casual staff**. “The **unions** are very concerned about the **ongoing casualisation** of the sector and frankly so are we. Yet due to the **very restrictive and expensive provisions** in these **agreements universities are being forced** to employ **more casual staff** in order to flexibly adapt to the **changing demands** of the sector. An undesired outcome for all.”

Change is coming: And no, this is not all talking tough before the bargaining starts. As one VC puts it; “once upon a time, **universities** were in the business of **creating and curating knowledge**. Much of the **new knowledge** nowadays is not created in universities but in the **private sector** and **Google does the curating**. We need to move to the space of making knowledge useful.”

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