

SECTION 3: SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Higher Education Reforms

The Federal Coalition Government came to power in September 2013 and subsequently announced its intention to undertake reviews of higher education funding, participation targets, quality assurance and regulatory burden.

The 2014-15 Commonwealth Budget handed down in May 2014, proposed significant structural and funding changes to higher education including: an average 20 per cent reduction in funding for Commonwealth supported places; fee deregulation to allow providers to set their own student fees for domestic students; extending the provisions of the demand driven system of uncapped places to non-university providers and to sub-Bachelor level qualifications, including the provision of government funding; and the introduction of student fees for research higher degrees.

These arrangements, intended to deliver budget savings of \$3.9 billion over three years, were articulated in a bill that was voted down by the Senate on 2 December 2014. A revised *Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014* was introduced into the House of Representatives on 3 December. The amended bill retracts the proposal to change the interest rates charged on student debts. The bill also makes provision for a \$100 million structural adjustment fund and a more targeted equity funding program to support regional universities, outer metropolitan universities and others with limited capacity to generate significant additional revenues under a deregulated student fee model. In February 2015, the Senate referred to its Education and Employment Legislation Committee and its Education and Employment References Committee inquiries into the provisions of the *Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014*, with both reports due by mid-March 2015.

In the event that, and the extent to which, the reforms are enacted; ECU will need to continue to develop and implement strategies to respond to the legislative changes that result.

The 2015 “Half-Cohort”

In 2001, the Western Australian Government increased the pre-school and school entry age by six months to align with other Australian states and territories. This change reduced the number of students commencing in kindergarten of that year by approximately 40 per cent. This has resulted in a reduced cohort of Year 12 school-leaver students of approximately 16,000 students in 2014, compared to 24,000 students in the previous year. This change will impact on ECU’s commencing student numbers in 2015 and 2016, and a range of strategies including cost containment, resource re-alignment and enrolment growth were implemented in 2014 in preparation for reduced revenues.

Course Accreditation

In 2014 ECU further embedded improved processes for achieving professional accreditation of its courses. As a result of revised and more rigorous course accreditation guidelines, the University secured a number of accreditations for courses in a range of disciplines including Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Nutrition and Dietetics, Speech Pathology, Information Technology, Accounting, Engineering, Advertising, Nursing, Occupational Health and Safety, Human Resources and Project Management.

ECU’s Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Health Advancement) continued to oversee a proactive approach to the accreditation of health courses, and ECU met all completion and compliance reporting requirements of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and Health Workforce Australia. Throughout the year, ECU maintained contact with the *Tertiary Education Quality and*

Standards Agency (TEQSA) to keep it informed of developments and actions taken by ECU in order to maintain the high quality and good reputation of its programs, including its over 150 professionally accredited courses.

Autonomous Sanctions and UNSC Sanctions

Sanctions imposed through the *Autonomous Sanctions Act 2011* (Cwlth) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) requires the University to implement compliance processes to ensure that the University does not: 1. provide sanctioned services to sanctioned individuals; and/or 2. deal with designated entities/individuals. The University has implemented relevant compliance processes and is monitoring the compliance obligations to verify that its processes and procedures continue to maintain compliance.

Harmonised Work Safety and Health Legislation

Harmonisation of the safety and health legislation across Australia will result in uniform work safety and health legislation across jurisdictions. Legislation in Western Australia was delayed and the new laws are now expected to be enacted in 2015. ECU has reviewed the proposed laws and is well prepared to meet the requirements of the new legislation.

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Act 2012

The ACNC Act requires all universities to register as a charity with the ACNC Commissioner, conditional upon meeting the required governance and external conduct standards. The registration includes the names of all Council members as responsible officers and therefore ECU is obliged to notify changes to the register records as these arise. In addition, ECU is required to provide the ACNC Commissioner with an annual information statement in the approved form.

Legal Deposits Act 2012 (WA)

The *Legal Deposits Act 2012* (WA) requires that Western Australia publications (including University publications) be deposited with the State Library, to ensure the ongoing collection and preservation of the State's cultural heritage for future generations. The compliance aspects of the *Legal Deposits Act* are being co-ordinated by the Library Services Centre.

Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act

The *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cwlth) (*ESOS Act*) and related legislation is designed to protect the interests of students coming to Australia on student visas. The Australian Government undertook a review of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) framework in 2014, to consider ways to better align the *ESOS Act*, the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students, and Streamlined Visa Processing.

ECU is supportive of the proposed amendments to reduce regulatory burdens on education institutions offering courses to international students, streamline standards and quality assurance processes, improved information sharing by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and improve flexibility to meet the changing needs of international students. Changes to the *ESOS Act*, ESOS framework and associated legislation are expected in 2015.