

# SECTION 3

## SIGNIFICANT ISSUES



## Commonwealth Funding

Funding to the Higher Education sector was a priority under the last two Federal Labor Governments, as it sought to drive a significant reform agenda to improve higher education participation and attainment rates. However, political pressure to return the Commonwealth Budget to surplus, in an environment of falling tax revenues, led to a scaling back of funding for the sector in the final term of the Gillard/Rudd Government.

Cuts in Higher Education spending included: the imposition of a 3.25 per cent Efficiency Dividend in 2014 and 2015; conversion of student start-up scholarships to income-contingent loans; the removal of the 10 per cent discount for up-front HECS/HELP payments; and the removal of the five per cent bonus for voluntary HELP debt repayments.

At the same time, additional funding was provided to meet the forecast increase in demand for Bachelor-level places in the demand driven system, and additional formula-based allocations were made under the Partnerships component of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program.

The Federal Coalition Government, which came to power in late 2013, has continued to support the funding commitments made under the previous Government. As a result, funding for additional (“capped”) Commonwealth supported places in postgraduate and Sub-Bachelor courses was included in funding agreements for 2014-2016.

## 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 kindergarten cohort in 2001 to approximately 40 per cent. By 2014, this “half-cohort” will result in a Year 12 school-leaver cohort of approximately 13,000 students, compared to 21,000 students in the previous year. This will impact on ECU’s commencing student numbers in 2015 and 2016, with school-leavers representing approximately 37 per cent of the University’s commencing domestic undergraduate enrolments.

## The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) commenced operations in early 2012 and the associated legislation introduced revised Australian Government regulatory arrangements. In 2013 a review of higher education regulation (entitled *Assuring the Quality while reducing the Higher Education Regulatory Burden*) was undertaken in response to sector concerns about the increasing burden of administrative “red tape” and regulation on universities. The report released in August 2013 supported the continuing role of TEQSA in ensuring quality in Australia’s Higher education system, but made recommendations to reduce reporting requirements imposed by TEQSA and the Department of Education. It is anticipated that the relationship between TEQSA and the sector will become clearer in 2014, as the recommendations of the review are implemented.

## Course Accreditation

ECU encountered a number of issues in relation to course accreditation in 2013, including the failure of the Masters of Physiotherapy course to gain accreditation and the temporary withdrawal of provisional accreditation for the Masters of Nutrition and Dietetics course. ECU undertook a significant review of accreditation processes and as a result of this review, implemented rigorous new accreditation guidelines including a proactive approach to health course accreditations in particular. In addition, the Vice-Chancellor has delegated responsibility for all health-related accreditation to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Health Advancement). Throughout the year, ECU maintained close contact with 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 200 accredited courses.

## Workplace Bullying

From 1 January 2014, employees may approach Fair Work Australia’s Anti-Bullying Panel directly to progress Workplace Bullying claims. Fair Work Australia’s Case Management Model and the Anti-bullying Benchbook were reviewed by ECU in conjunction with information provided by Safe Work Australia to ensure that ECU’s internal policies comply with the changes and the information is communicated University-wide. ECU is well prepared for the change in reporting process.

## Defence Trade Controls

Australia works with its allies to identify and regulate sensitive military and strategic technologies, which are compiled in the Defence and Strategic Goods List (DSGL). Strengthened export control legislation was introduced to control the intangible supply, brokering and publication of these same goods and technologies through the *Defence Trade Controls Act 2012* (Cwlth).

Changes of particular relevance to ECU include:

- regulation of intangible exports such as software and electronic files (including those transferred by person-to-person contacts or email);
- regulation of defence services; and
- brokering in such goods or services internationally, where there is a connection with Australia, but not necessarily involving an actual export from Australia.

In 2013 the Australian Government appointed a Strengthened Export Controls Steering Group to assess the regulatory and organisational impacts of the new regime of controls. Eight separate pilots in the next two years will test the regulatory impact of the Act on the research and industry sectors (including universities) and specifically, the costs and benefits associated with the new controls, the feasibility of their implementation, the necessary processes and interactions for implementation of the Act, and modifications prior to the offence provisions coming into full effect. ECU will monitor the outcome of the pilots and will develop risk management and compliance protocols to mitigate risks created by this change in legislation.

## Autonomous Sanctions and UNSC Sanctions

Sanctions imposed through the *Autonomous Sanctions Act 2011* (Cwlth) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) require 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 2014. ECU has reviewed the proposed laws and is well prepared to meet the requirements of the new legislation.

