Special Edition: Working in Australian Academia

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Introduction

> In the 15 years between 1996 and 2011, Full Time Equivalent (FTE) casually employed academics grew by 81 per cent….By 2011, casual academics represented 25 per cent of teaching and research and teaching only academics…Casual academics are estimated to carry 50 per cent of the teaching load, including up to 80 per cent of first year teaching load…When it is considered that one FTE casual ranges from one to 16 persons, it is not surprising that there are now twice as many casually employed academics in Australia as there are academics in continuing employment, including fixed term employment (Ryan et al 2013: 1)

> The Australian academic profession has lost its attractiveness due to declines in status, control, prestige and salary (Bentley et al 2013: 30)

In February 2013 the annual conference of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ) was held in Fremantle, Western Australia, and organised by Curtin University Business School and the University of Western Australia Business School. The conference brought together nearly 120 academics from Australia and New Zealand, as well as visitors from France, the UK, Canada, Singapore, the US, and Switzerland. Keynote speakers were Pun Ngai, from Hong Kong University, talking about 'Apple, Foxcomm and workers struggles', and Michael Burawoy from the University of California, discussing 'Social movements in an era of neo-liberalism'.

Streams/sessions at the conference ranged from 'Green Jobs', though 'Precarity' to 'Industrial Relations Theory'. Subjects familiar to AIRAANZ around unions and collective bargaining figured strongly, as did less familiar areas such as 'Creative workers and cultural industries, and 'Work and migration'. Special panel sessions discussed 'Labour in the Asian century', 'Gender and recession', and 'Work and career in Australian universities'.

It is to the last of these panels that we have turned for the focus of this special edition of ***Labour and Industry***, drawing entirely on contributions to AIRAANZ 2013. The theme of AIRAANZ 2013 was 'Work, employment and employment relations in an uneven patchwork world'. The conference was held in Western Australia, a region in the grip of a skill/labour shortage in the resources sector but declining employment in manufacturing. The much discussed 'resources curse' with its associated high dollar was also causing problems for work and workers in sectors such as Higher Education and care work. The contrast between sectors, between the East and West Coast and more dramatically within China, Europe and the US remains stark. In this complex, uneven world, workers, their communities, employers and governments face an unpredictable and often dramatic and threatening future. This refrain echoed around the conference. And yet, when examining academia in this turbulent world, Bentley et al (2013: 1) conclude that:

> Given its importance, surprisingly little at an aggregate level is known about people who teach and carry out research in universities, about the characteristics of the academic profession or about what is required to ensure its sustainability and future development.

This special edition seeks to fill in some of these gaps, at least in the Australian context.

The academic labour process

> Studies of job satisfaction in Australian universities have routinely offered a somewhat depressing image of life in the academy, calling into question the sustainability of an industry reliant upon autonomously motivated knowledge workers (Bentley et al 2013: 29-30)

A recent report for the UK based Institute for Public Policy Research (Barber et al 2013) had the apocalyptic title 'An avalanche is coming' over the slightly more restrained sub heading 'Higher education and the revolution ahead'. The report argued that radical and urgent transformation is required in higher education as the traditional university is being 'unbundled'. The traditional multipurpose university with a combination of a range of degrees and a modestly effective research programme has, apparently, had its day (Barber at al 2013: 5). Global competition is driving greater competition between universities, amplified by a range of new players such as MOOCs providers and consultancies that provide cutting edge research. The key message, according to the IPPR, is that the new student consumer is king (sic) and standing still is not an option.

Even if we don't accept the slightly hysterical tone of the IPPR report, it is the case that higher education has undergone and continues to undergo often painful processes of change. Furthermore, this is unlikely to slow down to any degree in the near future. If not as dramatic as the situation confronting some sectors and countries, Higher Education in Australia and New Zealand faces a challenging future. Already home to a heavily casualised workforce, the pressures of increased student numbers, funding challenges, technological change (the much vaunted MOOCs), and the differential impact of ERA within and between Universities, the impact on the sector, according to some commentators is already dire:

> The notion of universities as institutions for the collective good has been largely usurped by the need to survive in an increasingly cut- throat marketplace. The once stereotypical image of an academic – a middle-class, pipe-smoking patriarch with all the time in the world to contemplate lofty ideas – has been replaced by the current reality of workers immersed in the rush of corporate activity, mostly aimed at peddling their institutions educational wares and maintaining market share. This change has been accompanied by bureaucratic practices and corporate jargon common to other sectors – inputs, outputs, targets, key performance indicators, performance management, unit costs, cost effectiveness, benchmarking, quality assurance and so on – that together form a system dedicated to maintaining corporate discipline, brand distinctiveness and market share (Hil 2012: 10).

Richard Hil's *Whackademia*, frightening and entertaining in equal measure, would have made most Australian academics wince. Hil's argument that discussions within and outside staff meetings increasingly focus on workloads, grant application, student enrolments etc. rather than any meaningful consideration of what we do and why we do it, would have struck a chord with many. As would his argument that reading scholarly works or sitting in quiet contemplation is viewed in many institutions as a monumental waste of time. The 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report – the Bradley Report – described by Hil as a turgid promotion of the values of mass higher

education, 'manages to by-pass any meaningful reference to academics as human beings' (Hil 2012: 96).

The driver behind this, as Ryan (2012: 4) argues is four previous waves of change that have swept the sector as well as the effects of the current fifth wave. The four waves of government induced policy and funding reform included massification during the 1980s, marketization in the early 1990s, corporatisation in the late 1990s and early 2000s and a fourth wave from 2003 to 2007 marked by greater efficiencies, compliance, quality and research measurements. Ryan characterises the current new wave of change as:

> Marked by an uncapped student system, a powerful watchdog TEQSA, and a second generation of Excellence in Research Australia (ERA), all accompanied by even more external and internal measurement, surveillance and control over universities and their academic workforce. Each successive wave has brought with it increased political and economic steering through what Habermas (1984) refers to as the mechanisms of bureaucratisation, and monetarisation, managerialism and money (Ryan 2012: 4).

Ryan et al (2013: 1) put more detail on these four major changes:

> ..a 28 per cent reduction in real Government funding between 1995 and 2005; a 72 per cent increase in student numbers against a 38.5 percent increase in academics in the period 2000 to 2011…; the 1997 introduction of the Higher Education Contract of Employment award to limit fixed term employment…; and, the pressure for research outputs form firstly the Research Training Framework and now Excellence in Research Australia framework resulting in over a third of academics being classified as research only…and a cross subsidisation of research from teaching activities…

In the Orwellian Newspeak of the New Managerialism, academics are urged to be more flexible (and/or agile) by the new breed of bureaucratic academic managers (often coupled with an urge to be lean as well). This language emerged from the restructuring of the manufacturing sector in the last twenty years. However, as Ryan (2012: 8) points out, corporatisation of higher education has had the effect of turning universities into machine bureaucracies, factories, Fordist production lines, the very antithesis of the supposedly agile organisation. Performativity is the order of the day, with KPIs aiming to make every university unique, yet only succeeding in driving a research agenda in restricted FoRs and publication aimed at A and A * journals that can and has only bred what Kuhn would have understood as boring science.

Senior management in universities, with some minor but ineffective grumbling, accepted government impositions and, as Ryan et al (2013 : 1) argue, used their own steering mechanisms such as budgets, structure and governance (bureaucratisation and monetarisation) to change subsystems. Senior management did to their own faculties, schools and departments what the government had done to them. This is a classic tight: loose New Public Management process wherein tightly controlled accounting procedures are used to devolve responsibility for administering the medicine further 'down the line'.

Of course this is far from the first time that the academic labour process has come under investigation at AIRAANZ conferences. For example, in 2005, Jennifer Sappey argued that the forces

of globalisation were transforming Australian higher education from a pedagogical exchange to a service encounter. Increased structural changes were coming in four major areas; the marketisation of the sector and increased competition between institutions; changes to higher education consumption patterns; the commodification of education consequent on marketization; and the administration and management of institutions(managerialism) (Sappey 2005: 495). The student, now recast as consumer/customer is no longer merely the focus of the output of the employment relationship but a party within it (Sappey 2005: 501).

Crises take different forms and some responses have unintended consequences. The ageing academic labour force has been called a growing crisis in recruitment (Petersen 2011). However the growing casualization of the Australian academic labour force alongside all the other changes we have outlined has resulted in Early Career Researchers becoming increasingly questioning of universities willingness or capability of providing the sorts of working conditions and career prospects which are sought after and would secure commitment. There is an expressed desire to be recognised for commitment and capability which clashes with the reality which more closely resembles being taken advantage of (Petersen 2011).

It has been forcefully argued that the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) exercise will also have unintended and deleterious consequences (Marsh et al 2012: 92), one of which, intended or otherwise, is the extension and nourishing of the Managerialism now infecting the system (Kwok 2013: 37). Research for the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) concluded that the ERA had accelerated detrimental changes in relation to research performance in a number of areas:

- Institutional and management behaviours and practices – form the institution-wide down to the intra-departmental level, in both formal and informal ways;
- The ways professional associations, disciplinary groups, and other groupings function, that can be generalised as communities of practice;
- The capacity for university staff not only to exercise autonomy, but basic precepts of academic freedom;
- degree research Career pathways – ranging from the opportunity for graduate students to commence higher to the career progress of early to mid-career researchers;
- The character, breadth and interdisciplinarity of Australian research, and in demonstrated instances, the prospects for translational science and policy-oriented research.

With respect to EWRA and its associated journal ranking fetishism, Young et al (2011: 87) concluded that 'the ERA journal ranking system is strongly and negatively affecting the employment relations field and could lead to the diminution of the number of Australian journals and researchers, and the amount of Australian research, in this field. This has obvious implications for the nature of work and employment.

Questions of the labour process inevitably raise issues of control and resistance. Commentators from Wilmott (1995) onwards have commented on the relative lack of resistance that these changes have engendered from the academic labour force. In recent years this situation has changed in the UK and other parts of Europe but in Australia relative quiescence seemed to be the dominant order. Reviewing the situation in Australia, Ryan (2012) adopts the zombie metaphor to explain the behaviour of academics. Here a zombie is defined as a person hypnotised and thus bereft of

consciousness and self-awareness but capable of responding to external stimuli. Zombiedom reflects academics apparent helplessness in the face of overwhelming change but must be read as a form of both resistance and survival. However, 2013 has witnessed a spate of disputes In Universities in the region. Dramatic picket lines in Sydney and ongoing disputes in a number of universities (including Curtin where this is being written) suggest that the living dead might be fighting back!

The papers in the Special Edition

This gives us a chance to reflect on our own position at work in a wider context. All too infrequently do we apply our own analytical skills to our own situation. Still relatively privileged for tenured members of the academy with full time positions, this situation is going to apply to a declining proportion of the academic world concentrated in a small number of globally competitive research intensive institutions. Even here casualisation and the appearance of the teaching only position heralds the further intensification of the academic experience. Driven by increasingly financialised key performance indicators, even 'iconic researchers' will find themselves monitored and assessed in a continual round that will undermine notions of academic autonomy.

This special issue is confronting and challenging. Confronting since it deals with the industry in which we work, and this is discomforting since we tend to remove and disembody ourselves from the processes and institutions we are researching. This is our industry, it is undergoing profound structural change and it contains some of the most extreme forms of casualization and workforce segmentation to be found in any industry. The challenge is one of addressing these profound workforce challenges. The following articles offer suggestions around improving pedagogy, reducing barriers to gender equality and addressing the aspirations of professional and administrative staff. The research also highlights the potential and limitations of IR solutions to many of the workforce and workplace issues confronting the sector. While enterprise bargaining has provided the opportunity to negotiate over and make improvements in conditions, there remains differences in terms of the details, conditions, and application of agreements across the sector, as well as the participation and bargaining power of segments of the workforce (Townsend et al,2013).

Even when we do reflect on our own world, it is sadly too true that we tend to look only at ourselves and not the myriad of other workers who are employed by these organisations in the business of higher education. Articles in this special edition try to redress the balance.

The first paper by Janice Bailey is the AIRAANZ presidential address from the conference. This is a reflective and challenging paper that addresses teaching and learning issues. Pedagogy is a very important component of the practice of being an academic and of the purpose of a university. Yet, is has been related in importance in terms of rewards, recognition and funding. Automated and superficial teaching performance reviews establish the limit of inquiry as regards the effectiveness of teaching and teaching practices. Janice has a commitment and a passion, to quality teaching and to the discipline of industrial relations. She states that: "I believe we should be active agents in developing our professional teaching selves, within the limits of the other demands on our working (and personal) lives. Working out how to incorporate new L&T know-how into our teaching practices to best prepare students for work life beyond graduation can be daunting, published material that speaks directly to IR academics is sadly scant, and sessions on teaching initiatives at many disciplinary conferences rare or non-existent. So my very

modest aim here is to offer some ideas that I hope may resonate with you, as they have with me. My purpose is not just to contribute to the literature on pedagogy in IR and HR, but also to enhance the quality of our teaching in these fields."

The address examines transition pedagogies, that is, the transfer of students to the workplace. Janice considers strategies that can be introduced to facilitate this transition, to enrichen the experience of both academics and students. She is mindful of the context and the challenges including the marginalisation of IR in business schools, the underling framework and assumptions of the HRM discourse (in which many IR academics and students are located), the schisms between program content and practice (and practitioners) and the complexity of professional practice. Thea address looks at the big issues facing teaching (and IR) with commitment and enthusiasm. It contains suggestions for bridging the divide between graduation and employment, and in the process enhancing the experience of graduates.

Katherine Ravenswood and XXX address the glass barrier facing female academics. They point out that despite universities facing a recruitment challenge in the context of an ageing workforce, women remain under represented in senior and decision making positions, and over represented in junior and sessional positions. The article, using structured interviews with staff at a New Zealand university, examines career path opportunities and obstacles for women. Drawing on the literature on the role of mentoring in supporting progression and based on their interviews, they find that patronage is an important process in supporting career progression. However, access to and success with patrons was found to be highly gendered. They state that "we found that regardless of gender, patronage was powerful in the promotion process. This was in the sense of having an active patron who provided opportunities for a more junior academic, as well as increasing their profile through the patron's networks. A patron is powerful because of the networks and the increased information available on promotion processes" Using the Cinderella fairy tale analogy they suggest that there are a number of potential endings to the story that are determined by networks, mentors and patronage. Even with a happy ending, there remain structural and institutional barriers confronting the career development of female staff.

Elizabeth Farelly and Gillian Whitehouse investigate the availability of parental leave within Australian universities. In particular they focus on the gender egalitarian features of leave arrangements at universities. They point out that in many respects the university sector has been progressive and exemplary in terms of delivering paid leave arrangements to staff through enterprise agreements. However, they point out that many parental leave arrangements focus on women in terms of design and access, and in turn presume a gendered model of care and division of household labour. For the purposes of the research they construct a gender equality index that measures the proportion of leave entitlements that are available to fathers. Three categories of arrangements were identified: gender impeding, equality enabling and equality promoting. Using this classification they examined the leave arrangements available at the 37 public universities in Australia. Following this they then examined the relationship between the gender equality of the leave arrangements and underlying structural and staff conditions at each university including size,

category, union density and organisational commitment to equity goals. The research finds that there has been progress in paid leave provision through enterprise bargaining, but that gender equality is unevenly distributed across universities. They note that: "Gender egalitarianism in parental leave has been pursued more unevenly, reliant on initiatives at the organisational level and thus dependent on how important the issue appears to local members and bargaining teams, as well as how acceptable it might be to management. Its adoption appears to be associated less with basic organisational charactersitics like size and resources or levels of unionisation than with organisational commitment to equity as part of a desire to be 'different' and a leader in social justice areas."

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Glenda Strachan XXX examine an important, growing and under researched component of the university workforce; their administrative and professional staff. They point out that the professional workforce is a sizeable (57%) and growing proportion of university staff, that it is heavily feminised (around two thirds), but is largely invisible in terms of research. Their growth is linked to the expansion of the sector (in terms of student numbers); the demands for increased accountability and reporting from the Federal government; and the growing managerialism of universities themselves with hierarchical organisational structures and extensive reporting requirements across all divisions. Using a 2011 survey of 19 Australian universities the researchers, from a gender perspective, examine the following conditions of employment: access to positions; representation within the hierarchy; promotion; access to leadership and educational levels. To obtain a perspective on the findings from the survey the authors compare their findings with an earlier national survey conducted in 1996 (Probert et al, 1998). The research finds that women dominate the lower levels of the (HEW grades) hierarchy, they are more likely to be initially employed at lower levels and they are under represented at higher levels (HEW 8 and above). The survey finds that staff qualifications have increased through time. They conclude that: "despite women's predominance as professional staff in universities, they remain under-represented at the senior ranks. It is clear that vertical gender segregation still operates in Australian universities.in the clustering of women and men at certain HEW levels, such that differences in HEW levels between the sexes still persist. "

Robin May, David Peetz and Glenda Strachan examine casual staff and the casualization of staffing at Australian universities. In particular they examine the conditions of those staff who deliver the bulk of teaching services at universities, the sessional academic. For many universities the number of sessionals employed is difficult to establish, and many are hired in aninformal and piece meal way, often outside of agreed conditions (Ryan et al,2013). The article examines three aspects of sessionals: their characteristics (age, gender, experience, qualifications); the condition that define the boundaries of the sessional labour market; and the barriers between sessional appointments and ongoing academic appointments. The article finds that the sessional workforce is highly gendered and segmented, and that sessional employment is not a bridge into ongoing employment. Interestingly the research finds major differences across disciplines in terms of the relationship between the academic and external labour market. For disciplines that are not linked to a substantive external labour market (eg classics) the potential to be trapped into and exploited

through sessional teaching is greater than disciplines with alternative employment (eg engineering, finance). Without mobility and alternative employment opportunities, job satisfaction of levels of frustration with sessional employment arrangements were high. The authors state that "Our study reveals far more about the casual academic workforce than has previously been known. Significant differences between the academic workforce and the casual academic workforce are revealed in relation to age, gender, and PhD qualification levels. .. ... For a majority of casual academic staff, casual work is part of their training and preparation for what they hope will be a more secure academic position. Yet many casuals do not see this door as opening to them."

Finally, as editors of this special edition, we would like to thank the editorial team at **Labour & Industry f**or giving us this opportunity to publish this interesting and challenging collection of articles that examines university employment. We would also like to thank Trish Todd of the University of Western Australia, who along with Al Rainnie, organised AIRAANZ 2013, and to the referees who provided constructive suggestions to the authors.

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