

All aboard the innovation train

by Julie Hare

The humanities, arts and social sciences will be central to Australia's national innovation system, a move that will bring it into line with some of the world's most innovative and creative countries.

Furthermore, new Innovation Minister Senator Kim Carr told *Campus Review* last week he would rigorously support the peer review system, affirmed the importance of blue skies research and described academic freedom as one of the central tenets of research quality assurance.

Kim Carr's 10-point plan

Innovation Minister Kim Carr's 10-point plan announced in April is:

1. strengthening investment in creativity and knowledge generation
2. building business investment
3. accelerating the take-up of new technology
4. supporting partnerships and collaborations
5. using government procurement to support innovative Australian firms
6. strengthen public sector-funded innovation and research
7. improving the nation's skills base
8. improving national innovation priorities
9. improving governance for innovation in terms of CRC programs and scientific agencies
10. reducing the large number of innovation programs to stop duplication and improve the national innovation system itself.

Carr, whose full title is Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, said innovation would be lifted as a priority in the national debate. A multidisciplinary approach would be fundamental in helping to address some of the more complex issues facing the nation.

"By igniting the creative spirit of our people, we will deliver great science and innovation solutions for industry society and the environment. Now this also applies to the humanities," Carr said. "I am using science not just in a narrow definition, but the European definition, which is knowledge of the

world – that is how we can take forward a program that will actually change the face of this country.

"There is absolutely no doubt about us adopting a multidisciplinary approach – this is a key concept."

Carr said universities and public research agencies would play a vital role in the process.

"We want to reinvigorate their capacity to undertake that task," he said.

Professor Stuart Cunningham, president of the Council of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, welcomed Carr's commitment.

"Australia's big problems and challenges can only be addressed through the combined efforts of both sciences," said Cunningham. "Water, climate change, obesity, new technologies – these are all big issues which any innovation agenda would need to include."

Cunningham said there was a global trend towards a more multidisciplinary approach to solving complex problems.

"It's a more holistic approach to innovation that includes a human factor, if you like."

Carr said the creation of a separate ministry meant the innovation agenda would receive the attention it deserves.

"By lifting the priority of innovation in the national public debate, through establishing a new department, we will be able to drive a whole new agenda aimed at building innovation right across the economy and society, from classroom to boardroom, from laboratory to factory floor.

"This is a huge opportunity to rethink how we can have a national innovation system and reinvigorate the culture of innovation in this country to improve our position in the world. I've long argued we've been slipping. We've set ambitious targets to ensure we achieve research collaboration between the public and private sectors and also to improve our capacity to compete internationally."

Carr said his first meeting outside the public service had been with Australian Research Council CEO Professor Margaret Shiel, which he described as extremely positive. The ARC will come under his responsibility and will be responsible for implementing the Future Fellowships scheme for mid-career researchers announced in the lead-up to the election



Carr affirmed the ARC's autonomy and said an FOI request had been lodged to uncover the truth behind the interference of former education Minister Brendan Nelson in rejecting peer-reviewed research projects for grants.

"The matter is one of the key issues that needs to be resolved. I've made it very clear we are about reinforcing the independence of the ARC. I believe the peer review method is sound and it distressed me very much that it was treated in such a cavalier and political way," Carr said.

There is no doubt the RQF is dead in the water and the only remaining issues for Carr are how to officially euthanase it and the development of a sleeker model in 12 months time.

"The RQF was fundamentally flawed, poorly designed and administratively expensive, and relied on measures that couldn't be defined. I'm looking to have a departmental briefing on how that can be done immediately.

"I've asked for a technical brief to make sure we scrap the RQF correctly and then I will use the next 12 months to build consensus on the nature of the metrics and the proxies for metrics for the replacement quality assurance system."

As for additional research funding, don't get your hopes up.

"I have every expectation we are in for a very tough budget."

Jones laments decay of maths, philosophy

by Joanna Mather

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard is right to focus her attention on dismantling Work Choices before turning to other issues such as higher education, influential intellectual Dr Barry Jones says.

The polymathic former science minister said he had every confidence Labor would deliver on its promise of an "education revolution" and refuted suggestions Gillard's portfolio is too large.

In the new Labor ministry she has responsibility for education, employment, workplace relations and social inclusion.

Jones was Labor's science minister from 1983 to 1990 and is the only person to be elected a fellow of all four of Australia's learned academics.

"Julia Gillard's priorities are absolutely right – she's got to get the 300kg gorilla that is Work Choices off her back," Jones said.

"I'm sure that's something she feels she can do quite quickly. [With that done] I think you will find education will be her very highest priority," Jones told *Campus Review* after delivering a

public lecture on the topic at Charles Sturt University last week.

But Jones also said he was disappointed higher education barely got a look in during the election campaign.

He criticised past governments of both creeds for the "managerial revolution" that had occurred within universities since the 1980s.

He said a lack of public funding had forced universities to rely on international students and "packaging subjects" such as IT and marketing. As a result, the building blocks of knowledge and understanding, subjects such as philosophy and mathematics, were in decline.

"Universities have really been transformed and are seen to a large extent now as being trading corporations," Jones said.

"They are essentially big business and the goal of universities to a large extent has really ceased to be a search for the meaning of life – it's been transformed into finding solutions for a client's problems.

"In other words, a client wants a particular kind of workforce and so the university says, 'Oh yes we can do that'.



"They'll say well we want a lot of MBAs or we want a lot of people who are IP experts in order to fit into an existing industrial or managerial structure."

And universities had little choice but to comply, Jones said.

"This is going to be one of the challenges that any new government has as it reviews its policies generally," he said.