

The Eye of the Storm

The Australian National University in the twenty-first century

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December 2021

A man of destiny

Nothing gets tongues wagging on a university campus quite like the impending arrival of a new vice-chancellor. But in late 2000, when news spread that Ian Chubb would take over from the incumbent Deane Terrell, there was more scuttlebutt than usual. Most people knew Chubb as the Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University in Adelaide, a position he had held since 1995. Others recalled his time at Monash University in the mid-1990s. Staff with slightly longer memories, however, had good reason to be wary of Chubb's arrival.

Chubb rose to national prominence in 1990 as Chairman of the Higher Education Council (HEC), the peak advisory body on tertiary education, following a successful international academic career in neuroscience. Soon after his appointment to HEC, the federal government commissioned the Council to examine the state of higher education in the ACT. In his report to the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services, Peter Baldwin, Chubb recommended that the Government re-examine a proposal to merge the ANU's teaching faculties with the Canberra College of Advanced Education (CCAEC), later to become the University of Canberra. He suggested that Canberra might be more efficiently served by two separate but complementary organisations: a university dedicated to teaching and a national institute focused on research.¹ The idea was proving resilient, having been first attempted by the Federal Minister for Education, John Dawkins, in the late 1980s as part of a national reform of the higher education sector.² It was no less incendiary this time around.

Once again, the ANU Council, administration, staff and students strenuously opposed this proposal.³ Indeed, the threat helped foster the kind of solidarity rarely seen or heard on university campuses, especially one with the divisions of the ANU. The Board of the Faculties rejected Chubb's attempted 'dismemberment' of the

¹ Review of Higher Education in the ACT: 'Chubb Report', ANUA 53-14.1.3.81(1), ANU Archives.

² Stephen Foster and Margaret Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996, pp. 343-7. On the history of the 1988 attempted merger, see: Sally Peters, 'The ANU – CCAEC Merger – why the intended amalgamation failed', BA (Hons) Thesis, La Trobe University, 1997.

³ *ANU Reporter*, 27 March 1991, pp. 1, 5.

University as 'expensive, time-wasting and destructive.'¹⁴ In a spirited letter to the Prime Minister, academics Bob Dixon and Andy Pawley (both linguists) claimed that the international community would see the proposed separation 'as an astonishing act of vandalism.'¹⁵ The Council of the CCAE, however, offered cautious support for the proposal.

The ANU's twin pillars — an institute dedicated to long-term research (The Institute of Advanced Studies) and a separate teaching arm (The Faculties) — made it a special case in the Australian education system. But the dual structure that made the University unique made it increasingly vulnerable to outside scrutiny and those looking to drive administrative and financial reform. Moreover, amalgamations had been occurring throughout Australia as part of the formation of the Unified National System of Higher Education, the brainchild of Labor's Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins. The ANU's unique legal foundation offered some protection from interference. As a creation of the Commonwealth Parliament, any move to split the University required a change to federal law.

At this time, control of the Senate rested with the Australian Democrats, who refused to support the motion. With the legislation going nowhere, a frustrated Baldwin wrote in the *Canberra Times* that he had been 'appalled' at the 'mischievous rumours, personal abuse [and] deliberate scare-mongering' that had been a feature of the debate.¹⁶ By March 1991, Baldwin conceded defeat, but he remained committed to the idea of one university for Canberra. In line with government policy, he encouraged the two institutions to pursue 'a federated model of amalgamation with progress to full integration over time'; a union that he maintained would 'bring an end to a history of unproductive duplication and destructive competition.'¹⁷

Chubb emerged from the public stoush relatively unscathed. If anything, his reputation had been enhanced. He appeared as a measured and forthright communicator, a leader seemingly immune to withering personal criticism. Bill Mandle, in his weekly column for The *Canberra Times*, described the 47-year-old

¹⁴ Hugh Lamberton, 'Baldwin berates participants in Chubb debate', *Canberra Times*, 2 February 1991.

¹⁵ Karen Hobson, 'ANU split: academic plea to PM', *Canberra Times*, 5 February 1991.

¹⁶ Hugh Lamberton, 'Baldwin berates participants in Chubb debate', *Canberra Times*, 2 February 1991.

¹⁷ Verona Burgess, 'Uni merger off, funds stay tight', *Canberra Times*, 28 March 1991.

Chubb as 'a man of destiny in educational administration.'⁸ Three years later, he was recruited to Monash University as a possible successor to their Vice-Chancellor, Mal Logan. However, Chubb clashed with Logan – another big man with big ideas – and he left after two years to become Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University.⁹

In the late 1990s, a few years before Chubb's arrival, the ANU faced a cluster of intersecting problems. The special allocation of government money that made up almost half of the University's annual revenue, known as the Block Grant, had been in slow decline for years. Undergraduate enrolments were falling. With a substantial portion of government funding pegged to student numbers, the University wrestled with how to stabilise the budget without expanding its undergraduate programs too rapidly or compromising the research programs that could attract competitive grants. These were questions not only for the bean counters; they cut to the heart of the University's identity and its unique place in the higher education landscape. Get the mix wrong, and it risked becoming a pale reflection of every other university in the country.

The optimists told themselves that the academic reputation of the staff would enable the University to hold out against the homogenising forces arrayed against it. But the pessimists doubted that the ANU had the stamina or solidarity necessary to win a fight against a government uninterested in the pleas from special cases. For his part, Terrell had been unable to buck the trend. Nor had been able to unite the University that had functioned with an unwieldy operational structure that had fostered division, internal tensions, duplication and inefficiency for almost half a century.

Terrell had been at ANU since the 1970s as a student and lecturer in econometrics and then as Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Commerce. Appointed Vice-Chancellor in 1994, he cut a genial figure. However, as his term progressed, he came under attack for the University's worsening financial position and his pursuit of an increasingly corporate style of management.¹⁰ To his

⁸ Bill Mandle, 'Realities dictate tertiary merger', *Canberra Times*, 5 December 1990.

⁹ Graeme Davison and Kate Murphy, *University Unlimited: The Monash Story*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012, p. 262.

¹⁰ Peter Stewart, *Interview with James Grieve*, 10 June 2009, ANU Emeritus Faculty Oral History Project, ANU Archive.

detractors, he was known as "Deane Terrible". As the cuts deepened, staff not only attacked Terrell and the University Executive, but each other. Among the more trivial spats were more serious accusations of favouritism and even corruption. In one case, staff made secret plans to secede from their research school to avoid the budget cuts.¹¹ Most of the friction was kept in-house, or at least to the pages of the campus newsletter, *ANU Reporter*. Terrell spent his final years at the helm on a rising tide of antagonism and weariness. He increasingly looked a man overwhelmed by the pace of change that had engulfed the ANU and the higher education sector more broadly.



Professor Deane Terrell was Vice-Chancellor of the ANU between 1994 and 2000. Image: Bob Cooper, ANU Photography. ANUA 226-861, ANU Archives.

Terrell resigned at a time when the University needed a more forceful leader, one less bound by tradition. But if those in charge had any particular ideas about how the ANU might preserve its special status in a new financial climate, they were cloaked behind opaque generalities. The ANU needed to be 'remade for the twenty-first century', said Chancellor Peter Baume of the task facing the next vice-chancellor. It is likely that he and the University Council didn't know how this might be achieved, only that change needed to come.

¹¹ Merle Ricklefs, 'Coombs Reflections' in Brij Lal & Susan Ley (eds.), *The Coombs: House of Memories*, ANU Press, 2014, pp. 59-60.

Finding a new vice-chancellor is never easy. Finding one with the right blend of skills and the force of character necessary to confront the well-entrenched power structures that defined the ANU would be harder still. The University's internal culture had been so resistant to interference that a risk-taking, larger-than-life leader was deemed necessary. The appointment of someone from outside the University was likely and probably essential. The ANU Council interviewed several impressive candidates, but none possessed that exceptional quality they thought the University needed. Baume decided to call Chubb, who had spent five years leading a dispirited Flinders University out of the doldrums and up the international rankings. Importantly, Chubb had the total confidence of the University executive team, including the Chancellor.



As Vice-Chancellor of ANU (2001-2011), Professor Ian Chubb oversaw the most significant structural reforms in the University's history. Image: ANUA 226-879, ANU Archives.

According to the former Chancellor of Flinders University, Sister Deirdre Jordan, Chubb had inherited a university in disarray, with low morale and limited resources. She found him 'a most affable personality', and his capacity to lead was immediately apparent. She recalled that Chubb had brought a sense of collegiality to staff and never once referred negatively to past situations but accepted problems as

his to solve. The University flourished during his five-year term, Jordan says. Students liked him and appreciated the opportunity to be more involved in decision-making. Hoping for a similar metamorphosis for the ANU, Baume persuaded Chubb to come to Canberra for an interview. He offered him the job the next day. 'We were indeed sad to see Ian go', Jordan recalled, 'but happy for his sake that he was going to ANU where his enormous potential could be more fully realised.'¹² Baume must also have known of Chubb's reputation for toughness — and his temper. After the genial but ineffective Terrell, Chubb was a hammer blow, appointed to crash or crash through.

In early 2001, a decade after his failed plan to 'split and merge' the ANU, Chubb returned with a sweeping mandate for change. Little wonder that a frisson of nervous excitement swept across the campus. Chubb arrived full of vim and vigour. Over 6ft tall and well clear of 100 kilograms, he looked like he might have found a lucrative career as a rugby forward rather than as a professor of neuroscience. The burly Chubb brought a refreshing charge of charisma and a direct communication style that his predecessors had lacked. As a Canberra outsider, he initially relied on others to build his networks and learn where power resided. Chubb quickly grew more comfortable and forged his own alliances across the campus. He also became more outspoken, venting his frustration with the procedural blockages and passive resistance that had thwarted many previous attempts at institutional reform. 'Things needed sparking up', he recalled.¹³

Chubb's intolerance of academic posturing and administrative blockages was well known. One of his first directives as vice-chancellor was to initiate a review of the University's fragmented administrative processes, functions that had evolved historically to serve the different research schools. Chubb was also committed to shifting the University's focus towards its students and the quality of the teaching they received. Chubb's family origins in rural and working-class Melbourne may have influenced his tendency to side with the students, especially when they came up against administrators intent on simply doing things as they had always been done.

¹² (Sr) Deirdre Jordan, Chancellor Emeritus, Flinders University, email to author, 12 August 2020.

¹³ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*, January 2016, ANU Emeritus Faculty Oral History Project, ANU Archive.

But his focus on student welfare also had a more pragmatic purpose. With the operating budget increasingly dependent on student numbers, improving the standard of teaching and student satisfaction with their learning experiences would be vital if the ANU were to grow. It did not take long before Chubb found an opportunity to demonstrate his ideas in less abstract terms.

When a handful of students wrote to him to complain that University administrators had stopped them from graduating with their classmates because they hadn't submitted their forms on time, the Vice-Chancellor took up their cause. He reminded those who administered the graduations that students should be afforded some leniency. After all, he told them, 'they're paying your salary ... and they're not getting [their education] for free.' He made it plain that these students would be graduating with their classmates.¹⁴ Chubb later introduced summertime graduations (a time when the campus typically shuts down as teaching academics work on their research) to allow international students to celebrate their achievements with their peers before returning home. Sometime later, a former senior administrator told Chubb that the University would not be having summer graduations if she had remained on staff. 'No', Chubb said bluntly, 'we'd be having summer graduations – and you wouldn't be here'.

Chubb's plan to boost undergraduate enrolments by lowering the ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank) number also met resistance. As he recalled, some staff were prepared to lose substantial amounts of government money from increasing student numbers rather than erode the University's elite status as manifest in the high entry requirements. As Chubb remembered later: 'Changing the hearts and minds of some people was going to be very difficult.'¹⁵

The business of leadership

The University is not a business, but it can be run in a business-like way ... I wasn't going to let the budget run the university, but I did recognise that the budget had to be balanced. Ian Chubb, 2016.¹⁶

¹⁴ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*.

¹⁵ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*.

¹⁶ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that an incoming senior executive must launch an organisational restructure. When Chubb arrived, one of the first things he requested was a functional map of the University that set out where particular activities took place. The results were telling, if unsurprising. 'There were very few activities that did not take place in multiple areas of the University', he said. For a man accustomed to targeting inefficiency, the way forward became apparent. In many ways, Chubb spent the next decade trying to address the duplication that this map had so plainly illustrated. The first step in bringing greater coherence and cross-disciplinarity to research and teaching was the formation of twelve National Institutes as a new structure to aid collaborative work across the University and improve the public visibility of those endeavours.¹⁷ But there was a need to go much further.

Chubb had only just settled in when Brendan Nelson, the ambitious Liberal Minister for Education, Science and Training, proposed a series of changes to the higher education system with ramifications for the ANU's recruitment drive. Chief among Nelson's reforms was the deregulation of HECS fees to shift the costs away from government and on to students. In a strongly worded response, Chubb protested that while universities were desperate for more funds, Australian students were already paying fees comparable to American universities. Furthermore, it was not in the national interest to deny the opportunity to learn to people who had the intellectual capacity but could not pay. The university system would not return to health, he railed, unless 'governments acknowledge and accept their responsibilities for public higher education'.¹⁸

Chubb's straightforward language was music to the ears of every impecunious undergraduate. On campus, his reputation as the students' champion soared. Even when the legislation passed, Chubb refused to pass on the fee increases. As he explained in *Woroni*: 'I'm going to hold out for as long as we can and

¹⁷ The 12 National Institutes covered: Asia and the Pacific, Environment, Indigenous Australia, Bioscience, Business and Economics, Government and Law, Health and Human Sciences Information Sciences and Engineering, Science, Social Sciences, the Arts, and the Humanities.

¹⁸ *Canberra Times*, 27 April 2002; *Canberra Times*, 24 August 2002.

if eventually I have to [raise fees] then I will be accused of having caved in...but I'm a large person and who can accept such blows to my ego.'¹⁹ Chubb held out until 2007 when budgetary pressure forced a 25 per cent hike in the HECS charge. The ANU was one of the last Australian universities to pass on the increase.

Notwithstanding the distracting clash with the federal government, Chubb's plan for university-wide reform might have begun earlier if not for the most significant natural disaster to affect the region in generations. On 18 January 2003, bushfires ravaged the southwestern suburbs of Canberra and decimated the Mount Stromlo Observatory, home of the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics. Quick thinking staff saved vital research, but over \$70 million in buildings, equipment and other infrastructure was lost. Staff returned to work soon after, but the recovery process was long, and a dispute with insurance providers was not resolved until 2011.

The disaster on Mt Stromlo overshadowed the early years of Chubb's vice-chancellorship and obscured an impressive start. By 2004, enrolments had stabilised and early success in winning competitive grants boosted the coffers. The long, slow reform of the University's unwieldy administrative and governance protocols had begun. Not everyone liked Chubb's muscular style. But, at least, no one could accuse him of indecisiveness or a lack of will. While the first few years had not been easy, the most problematic years of his tenure lay ahead. The ANU in the new century was always going to be different. Just how different remained to be seen.

The Review

I agree that it is in the best interests of the ANU, and indeed all Australian Universities, to undergo a comprehensive quality review to determine whether its goals and objectives are being achieved effectively, and to facilitate continuous improvement.

Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training, 2 March 2004.

¹⁹ *Woroni*, 26 July 2004.

Institutional reviews have been a routine feature of the higher education management landscape since the 1970s. By the 1980s, a new language of 'strategic planning' and 'business management' had thoroughly permeated Australian universities, just as it had the working world more broadly. With the new vernacular came a demand for new tools to administer and direct the Institution. At the ANU, most reviews of research and teaching were undertaken on a school-by-school basis. Given the highly specialised nature of their work, it made good sense to do so. Yet, the practice tended to reinforce what many staff and students intuitively sensed: that the ANU was not so much a university but a composite of autonomous, high-functioning parts. For the University Council and senior management, gaining a strategic overview of the Institution was frustratingly difficult. Reliable and comprehensive data on which to base a University-wide assessment was even harder to come by. The first whole-of-university review did not occur until 2004, some sixty years since the creation of the University in 1946. A review of the IAS had been scheduled for 2001, but the University Council decided it was no longer meaningful to review the research arm in isolation from the teaching Faculties and other Centres, especially given recent efforts to develop closer linkages between the University's many intersecting parts.

South African born historian, Professor Deryck Schreuder, led the 11-member review committee made up of international academic and industry leaders.²⁰ Given the somewhat amorphous brief of evaluating the 'quality of research and educational outcomes' at the ANU, committee members made their assessments using a wide range of data, including bibliometric analysis, peer assessment, comparative performance data, focus group discussions, as well as the input of students, staff and alumni. Even allowing for the usually coded language of such

²⁰ The other members of the Committee were: Professor Tom Everhart, President, California Institute of Technology; Professor Deborah Freund, Vice-Chancellor and Provost, Syracuse University, New York; Professor Franz Kuna, former Rector, Klagenfurt University, Austria; Sir Colin Lucas, Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford; Ms Heather Ridout, Chief Executive, Australian Industry Group; Professor Frank Shu, President, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan; Professor Wim Stokhof, Director, International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden, The Netherlands; Professor Jan Veldhuis, former President, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands; Professor Sir David Williams QC, Life Fellow, Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge. External members were: Professor Jeremy Knowles, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, Massachusetts, United States and Dr Rita Colwell, Director, National Science Foundation, United States.

inquiries, the final report was far-reaching and clear-eyed. The inclusion of Chinese proverbs and quotes from the latest scholarship about the social purpose of universities leavened what most expected to be a somewhat prosaic read.

The ANU was at a crossroads, the report stated, 'a hinge in history, a crucial moment when the ground seemed to be shifting.'²¹ The climate in which all universities operated had changed and continued to evolve rapidly. Threats were everywhere. The reluctance of governments to invest in higher education, a lack of private investment, and falling demand from domestic students created a palpable sense of dread: 'Universities have never been more important to society than currently. Yet equally, the challenges to higher education have rarely been greater. ANU exists in the eye of the storm.' Furthermore, funding incentives encouraged University researchers to pursue fewer experimental projects with short-term goals. The central mission of higher education and research was at risk, they argued. Failure to take action not only threatened the ANU's capacity to contribute to national research objectives but would also 'endanger the university itself.'²²

The ANU faced a more immediate problem. Since the mid-1990s, Labor and Coalition Governments had reduced the indexation rate applied to the Block Grant, the unique parcel of funds that enabled the ANU to undertake long-term research. Overall revenue had grown by 70 per cent since the mid-1990s, from \$307 million to \$524 million in 2003. But the proportion of funds coming from the base operating grant (including the Block Grant) had declined from 65 per cent of total revenue to 36 per cent over the same period. A decade of financial decline in real terms had taken the University to a tipping point. The cost of doing research (salaries, equipment and other infrastructure) had increased. While the immediate budget was sound, the University had almost no discretionary income or savings to meet a backlog of building replacements and refurbishments or investment in new technology. The primary source of income growth came from fees, investments, bequests, and proceeds from sales and business activities. It was not enough. As the Block Grant fell into decline as a proportion of the budget, the University needed to look elsewhere.

²¹ ANU: *University with a difference*, p. 11.

²² ANU: *University with a difference*, p. 10.

In the late 1990s, the University successfully negotiated access to the competitive research grant schemes of the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), access that had been barred due to the University's special funding arrangements with the Commonwealth. The first tranche of grant money started in 2000. The decision had been controversial, not least because the Government reduced the Block Grant by 10 per cent to 'buy-in' to the system. The 2004 Report warned that even though the ANU's 'winnings' exceeded its investment by some margin, these grants were tied to short-term research, in contrast to the long-term research enabled by the untied funding from the block grant. The long-term impact on the range and size of research projects might take decades to emerge. In the short term, it meant a reduction in the number of tenured academics and an increased reliance on casual and contracted staff. Scholars and research assistants now added writing grant applications to their growing list of administrative duties. Many were concerned with the symbolism of the change, which moved the ANU a little closer to the more familiar organisational pattern of other Australian universities.

It was not all bad news. In fact, despite the grim predictions, the Review Committee found much to celebrate. Teaching and research-intensive scholars alike — from the physical sciences to philosophy — were hailed for their innovative and 'world-class' achievements. The financial stability provided by still generous block funding had given the IAS the capacity to undertake long term, large scale and higher-risk research projects which would be difficult to undertake when supported only by competitive funding measures. Students reported high levels of satisfaction with undergraduate teaching and postgraduate supervision. Surveyed staff were content with the 'intellectual climate and infrastructure', even if the technical equipment and building facilities were outdated and a little careworn. Overall, the Review found the ANU to be a 'focused university of positive morale and first-class academic achievement.'²³

While ANU had proved to be purposeful and resilient in uncertain times, the Review Committee also found that this success had tended to obscure the deeper

²³ ANU: *University with a Difference*, 2004, p.6.

fault-lines, tensions and systemic inefficiencies that had been a defining feature of academic life at the ANU since the 1960s. The Review spared the previous leadership from direct rebuke, but the implication was clear: a resilient spirit and ‘workaround’ solutions to the seemingly intractable internal organisational problems would not be enough to meet the challenges of the new century. It was to these complex issues that the Report now turned.

The bifurcated University

[T]he inter-twining of the Institute within the fabric of one University is an essential ingredient of productivity improvement.

ANU: University with a Difference, 2004.

In September 1990, Vice-Chancellor Laurie Nichol welcomed visitors to the open day at the ANU: ‘The Australian National University is a unique national institution’, he said. ‘Its special strengths lie in its dual structure for teaching and research.’²⁴ The idea that the University’s unique structure and funding arrangements had been fundamental to creating its productive research culture was a view widely shared and celebrated. Whether it was the most efficient use of the University’s resources or the best way to foster collaborative endeavour was a more contentious proposition.

The tension between research-intensive academics and those who taught full-time started early, even before the amalgamation in the 1960s. By the turn of the century, finding anyone with unquestioning faith in this unique model was near impossible. Various attempts had been made to bring the Institute and The Faculties closer together, including bridging structures such as specialist research centres and the Graduate School. Joint appointments, regular secondments and cross-teaching also helped. But depending on where one looked, a yawning gulf remained, and the administrative, academic and physical structures that kept the two arms apart remained firmly in place. Personal relations across the divide ranged from cool

²⁴ Laurie Nichol, ‘A warm welcome to the ANU’, *Canberra Times*, 10 September 1990.

indifference (this being by far the most common sentiment) to internecine warfare with the intensity of a blood feud.

When he started, Chubb recalled that the ANU had a reputation as ‘the University with two of everything’.²⁵ Duplication and inefficiency were not just enabled structurally, he noted, but embedded in the University’s cultural and historical fabric.²⁶ Every review remarked upon these issues, which had become an accepted cost of research and study at the ANU. In 1995, Richard Campbell, Professor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, made an impassioned plea to those charged with reviewing the IAS to remember that the ANU was ‘One University’ and that any change to the Institute would also affect the Faculties. ‘This Review is not just about the future of the Institute of Advanced Studies’, he wrote, ‘it is about the future of the University as a whole.’ Jibes and snarky remarks even made their way into annual reports. In 1995, the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSH) yearly report noted that while their non-tenured staff were often keen to obtain teaching experience, even offering to take responsibility for whole courses, ‘the response to such possibilities from The Faculties is not always enthusiastic.’²⁷

As was now customary, the 2004 Review Committee called out the duplication, administrative inefficiency and lack of interdisciplinary collaboration. Only this time, the analysis went deeper. Engagement between the research school and the faculties had been strongest in mathematics, engineering, and the physical and chemical sciences. Law, anthropology and linguistics had also yielded positive cross-campus research outcomes. But, even here, there was room for improvement. Respondents showed themselves to be ‘well aware of the importance of such engagement’, yet the Review Committee recorded what it described as a ‘non-uniform commitment’ to collaboration across the University and named the offending disciplines.

²⁵ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*.

²⁶ Ian Chubb: *Interview with Daniel Oakman*, 2 September 2020.

²⁷ *Annual Report: Research School of Social Sciences, 1995*, p. 205. The reverse was also true. A review of Chemistry in 2008 found that senior staff from the Research School had discouraged some postgraduate students from participating in undergraduate teaching in the Department of Chemistry. *Report of the 2008 Review of Chemistry*, ANU, April 2008, p. 9.

The only member of the Committee with personal experience working at the ANU was Schreuder. He had been a Research Fellow with RSSH in the 1970s and Associate Director of the Humanities Research Centre in the 1990s. It showed, not least because the report exhibited an insider's knowledge of the particular foibles of the IAS and its relationship to the rest of the University. The social sciences were subject to an especially detailed critique. Economics research was spread over seven different areas of the University, yet undergraduate teaching was confined to just one. While the University had a notably large and diverse group of economists, the strength of the research was variable and below the expected levels of performance: 'There is a need to focus research in Economics and improve collaboration among the academic units, to increase impact and bring the multiplicity of perspectives to more students, both undergraduate and postgraduate'. Similarly, environmental research was distributed across several small academic units. As a result, it lacked 'sufficient critical mass to make the outstanding impact that is needed, and of which it is capable, to help address national and international problems.'

In trying to discover some of the deeper reasons for the lack of coordination, the Review also suggested that the University suffered from a curious lack of self-awareness about its research strengths. This was especially evident in the arts and the humanities. Taking a more consolidated view of this work could strengthen the distinctiveness of undergraduate programs, the Committee suggested. It recommended the creation of a new Research School for the Humanities to help affect this process. The Committee also noted the reverse. In areas where the University was keenly conscious of its distinctive research contribution, such as public policy, no undergraduate or postgraduate courses were available. The case was similar in the research on the Pacific and Oceania: 'While there is no doubt that ANU conducts a significant amount of the world's leading research in this area, it is barely encountered by undergraduates studying the humanities, social sciences, and relevant science disciplines such as environmental science.'²⁸

In the final analysis, no one escaped censure. The Review offered a robust critique of a University that, over decades, had drifted from its central mission by

²⁸ ANU: *University with a Difference*, pp. 51-2.

ineffective leadership and a rigid operational structure. The writers choose a vivid geographical metaphor to illustrate the point. The University had come to resemble an 'archipelago of intellectual pursuits' where certain islands had 'detached from the mainland if not the heartland of the University.'²⁹

Across the whole gamut of teaching and research, the Review stated that closer engagement 'may be facilitated by co-location or even integration of some academic units.'³⁰ The Review Committee commented favourably on Chubb's leadership as 'driving forward a program of renewal and diversification.'³¹ They singled out the creation of the National Institutes as a good step towards reducing duplication and increasing collaboration across the campus, and presenting the ANU in a more integrated and coherent way to the outside world. Recasting the IAS as a more permeable and accessible entity, closely integrated with the research and teaching community, might bring a greater sense of cohesion:

a more porous notion of the Institute would be beneficial to both staff and students: it would give all younger staff the opportunity for gaining teaching experience and assist them in their careers; it would give older research staff the opportunity to be refreshed through engagement with the challenges that young minds present; and it would give students more frequent and direct exposure to some of the world's leading researchers whose knowledge is ahead of anything they could read or hear from others. Above all, the inter-twining of the Institute within the fabric of one University is an essential ingredient of productivity improvement, not least through the greater opportunity for staff of the Faculties to concentrate on their research.³²

Some of these ideas had been tried before. The Mathematical Sciences Institute had successfully achieved this kind of integration since it was formed in 1989. Yet, structurally it was unusual. It raised the thorny question: were the barriers to cooperation a matter of organisational structure, or were they a matter of leadership?³³ Regardless, if implemented campus-wide, the proposed

²⁹ ANU: *University with a Difference*, pp. 8, 46.

³⁰ ANU: *University with a Difference*, p. x.

³¹ ANU: *University with a Difference*, p. 52.

³² ANU: *University with a Difference*, p. x.

³³ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University*, pp. 405-6.

reconceptualisation of the IAS would be the most significant reform to research practice ever attempted in the University's history. But what would this mean for the future of IAS? And, would it go far enough?

The Review warned that the University's enviable national and international reputation had deflected attention from another cluster of issues that, if ignored, would lead the whole University into decline. Of particular concern was the composition of the workforce, which was male-dominated and aging. From the beginning, the ANU had fostered passionate loyalty from staff, aided by the collegiate atmosphere, good working conditions and tenure. One unintended consequence of the high retention rate was the importation of the gender imbalances of the 1970s into the new century, a demographic pattern most notable in the IAS.³⁴ Generational renewal had also suffered because there were too few opportunities for younger scholars, especially women. Furthermore, there was an urgent need for leadership development.

The Review claimed that the number of postgraduate students was well below international standards, although it conceded that enrolments had improved since the mid-1990s. More concerning was the fact that staff in the Faculties were shouldering the bulk of the supervisory load, not the full-time researchers in the Institute. 'In some of the strongest research areas [in the IAS] student numbers are inexplicably low, representing a serious opportunity cost for the nation', the Review explained. The observation only confirmed the opinion of some Faculty staff that the cossetted set on the hill had been shirking their responsibilities.

If it was to thrive, the University needed to reorganise itself into a coherent and cohesive community, the report stated. Moreover, it needed to be seen to be doing so. 'Modern universities have responsibilities to make constructive civic contributions ... ANU does so contribute, but it is not as visibly connected as it needs to be.'³⁵ Among the many changes now required, reform could only occur as part of a more ambitious reimagining of the entire culture of the University. The Review urged the University to aim high and become an 'academically elite (residential university)' with up to 6000 undergraduate students receiving an intensive education

³⁴ *Annual Report: Research School of Social Sciences, 1995*, pp. 203-4.

³⁵ *ANU: University with a Difference*, p. vi.

integrated with research. The template for this reinvention, they suggested, was not Oxford or Cambridge, but the private Ivy League university, Princeton, in New Jersey, USA.³⁶

Released to the public in September 2004, the newspapers lauded the Review as the first comprehensive international comparison undertaken by an Australian university. Journalists noted that researchers from other universities had questioned some of the analytical methods used to support some of the report's more generous findings. The more critical elements buried in its 100-pages went unreported. Chubb, meanwhile, was free to use the moment to promote the ANU as the 'best university in the country.'³⁷ Two months later, the highly regarded *Times Higher Education Supplement* ranked the ANU as the 16th-best university in the world and the best in Australia. Chubb was ebullient:

As Australians we commonly recognise elite athletes, elite singers, even elite racehorses — and it is time our elite academics and students had a slice of the attention ANU is still the only Australian university that has a Commonwealth-legislated responsibility to conduct research. We take that responsibility very seriously and our recent quality review was conducted to show not just our current position, but also how we could become even stronger.³⁸

Typically tight-lipped when it came to the media, Chubb had given his first hint, albeit a subtle one, that the Review had triggered a significant reappraisal of the University's operations.

Inside the ANU, reactions to the Review were more circumspect. The complex issues it raised were not new, but never had the entire University — from its financial underpinnings to its organisational culture — been subjected to such a frank and unflinching assessment. The Review described an ambitious vision for the future. But how to realise it was far from clear.

³⁶ *ANU: University with a Difference*, p. 95.

³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September 2004, p. 15.

³⁸ *Canberra Times*, 6 November 2004, p. 1

The University responds

The world is changing, and it is obvious that the ANU must position itself for that changing world.

Operational improvements to the academic structure of the Australian National University, 2005.

In late 2004, Chubb was riding high. The University's finances were under control. Recovery from the Stromlo disaster was underway. Staff welcomed the signing of a collective enterprise bargaining agreement and the resistance of pressure from the Government to embrace individual Australian Workplace Agreements. Students rejoiced at Chubb's public stance against the Nelson reforms and the pressure to increase HECS charges. Max Jegathan, President of the ANU Student Association, was especially forthcoming, telling *Woroni*: 'Rarely have I come across someone as qualified and decorated as Ian with such a moral and ethical commitment to the ideas of access, equity, fairness and quality.'³⁹

The reform of the University's administrative processes had also yielded impressive early results. According to a report by Professor Ken McKinnon and Ms Sue Walker, in the three years since their assessment in 2001, there had been a 'sea change in the administration of the ANU' with an 'enabling culture' and a 'can-do attitude replacing the previous sense of inefficiency and drift'. Improvements were more unevenly distributed than they hoped, but 'all are working with enthusiasm and application'. For his part, they applauded the Vice-Chancellor for his 'vigour and imagination' having 'gained the full cooperation of staff.'⁴⁰

The University Council still had faith in Chubb's leadership. And while the overall reform of the ANU was progressing more slowly than they hoped — in some ways, it had barely started — it came as no surprise that they unanimously agreed to extend his term. Chubb, too, was keen to finish what he had begun. At \$520,000, the Review had not come cheap, and Chubb could not afford to lose the momentum its release had generated. Within months, senior staff attended a planning retreat in the Snowy Mountains to prepare a detailed response.

³⁹ *Woroni*, 26 July 2004.

⁴⁰ *ANU: Annual Report, 2004*, pp. 11-12.

Some of the Review's recommendations were already underway or under discussion by the University Council. But many were not. Chubb was convinced that time for piecemeal change had passed; a more fundamental reorientation was now required. The group worked from a broad consensus that the 'ANU should function and plan as one University' and that 'some, though not all, of the old ways at ANU are antithetical to the future prosperity of the University.'⁴¹ No one at the retreat was under any illusion about the magnitude of the changes under discussion. On the contrary, some were keenly aware that the new structure — intended as it was to bring the University closer together — might also tear it apart.

In the months following the retreat, Chubb used a series of meetings with academic and general staff to refine the proposals. The blueprint finally submitted to University Council in June 2005, *Operational Improvements to Academic Structure of the Australian National University*, endorsed most of the recommendations outlined in the 2004 Review. But it also went much further.⁴² The Review Committee's central proposals were for a reconfiguration of how the IAS and the Faculties interacted. It did not propose anything as bold as the wholesale restructuring of the University. And, yet, this is precisely what Chubb and others involved in the planning process were advocating.

The centrepiece of the new plan was the formation of seven Colleges as the 'new vehicle to bring coherence and planning in order to position ANU to respond to an unpredictable future.'⁴³ Rather than make the IAS a more 'porous' entity, as the Review had urged, the University decided to merge it with the Faculties. The theory went that the co-location of research and teaching would produce a more cohesive and integrated community better able to sustain an innovative, research-led curriculum. Academic endeavour across the University was to be clustered along disciplinary lines, not administrative ones. In doing so, it flipped the decades-old framework where the University's rigid operational apparatus determined where particular scholarly endeavours took place. The precise composition and naming of

⁴¹ Operational improvements to the academic structure of the Australian National University, 2 June, 2005, p. 5.

⁴² *Operational improvements...*

⁴³ *Operational improvements...*, p. 2.

the Colleges would take time to bed down, but the first iteration comprised: Law, Science, Arts and Social Sciences, Asia and Pacific Studies, Business and Economics, Engineering and Information Technology, and Medicine and Health Sciences. The transition took years to implement fully, a time remembered by some as one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the University.

The language used to describe the new structure mattered. University executives tended to refer to the new model as a ‘merger’, a blend of the best elements of both traditions in teaching and research. For those suspicious of University management, it was little more than a weasel word, a euphemism for the erasure of the IAS and everything it stood for. With fewer research-intensive positions available and generous redundancy packages on offer, they had a point. Both the Board of the IAS and the Faculties were abolished in 2004, with their functions brought under the control of the University Council.⁴⁴ Significantly, the reorganised Research Schools and Centres bore a far greater resemblance to the Faculties with their mix of teaching and research activities than the corridors of scholars working almost solely on their research endeavours. The block funding that had sustained the IAS since the creation of the ANU would now be distributed according to a new method, one that some staff did not understand or trust. Time for research had to be ‘earned’ by winning grants and paid consultancy jobs that would allow them to ‘buy out’ their teaching loads. Reporting obligations were more rigorous and more frequent, as was the assessment of staff performance.

Staff greeted the new plan for the ANU with a mixture of ambivalence, apprehension and fear. According to Chubb, there was no ‘organised resistance’ to the proposed College system. ‘There was anxiety’, he recalled, ‘but we still had to change, we still had to move.’⁴⁵ His comment underplays the depth of mistrust felt in parts of the University. Some staff worried that they might lose their jobs if they spoke out, or at the very least that they would have to apply for them again in a ‘spill and fill’.

⁴⁴ During the transition to new governance arrangements these two bodies continued as separate ‘Forums’ until 2005.

⁴⁵ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*.

Chubb had become a polarising figure. 'If he was on your side, you had no better ally', remembers one former senior staff member. If challenged, he could be 'capricious and quick to anger', recalled another. Although a skilled strategist and tactician, Chubb sometimes lacked insight into how his behaviour affected others. He famously installed a six-foot purple punching bag in his office to pummel before difficult meetings.⁴⁶ One senior staff member recalled that Chubb summoned his Executive Assistant to his office, not with a telephone call or by walking to her desk, but by bashing on the adjoining wall. He could be contemptuous of dissent, once telling a senior academic who planned to leave the University that he was a 'dickhead' for passing up a special position Chubb had created to incite him to stay. In full flight, his tempestuous demeanour could be unsettling. Few spoke up or made any formal complaint, but several senior people left because of it. Even today, the mention of Chubb's management style still brings nervous glances and hushed confessions. His nicknames tell the story. His supporters called him 'Chubby'. Those on the receiving end of his more authoritarian decisions called him 'Voldemort', a reference to the character from the J. K. Rowling's series of Harry Potter novels.

While researchers in the IAS endured uncertainty about their future roles, staff in the Faculties carried much of the additional work that came with the University's rapid expansion, with many on less secure forms of employment. Long accustomed to juggling their teaching and research commitments, many lecturers found that their teaching loads had increased, making it even harder to find time to publish. In addition, teaching staff found it harder to shield their students from the impact. In 2010, Genevieve Kenneally, a recent Arts graduate, told the *Canberra Times*: 'My experience over the past three years is that through no fault of their own, lecturers have become exhausted'.⁴⁷ According to James Grieve, an academic from the School of Language Studies, the equation was simple: 'too many students, not enough teachers'. In 1999, Grieve had reluctantly accepted a so-called 'voluntary redundancy' but remained on staff to teach full-time without pay.

The Chubb reforms coincided with a significant generational change, particularly in the Research Schools. An invitation to become a scholar in the IAS was

⁴⁶ 'Melding town and gown', *Canberra Times*, 26 June 2006, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Canberra Times*, 4 February 2010.

a plum job by any measure. Akin to landing a position in the public service, it was a job-for-life but with more autonomy and a private office. By the early 2000s, the cohort of scholars and professional staff that had joined the University during the 1970s and 1980s were nearing the end of their careers. After decades of work, many were tired and wary of any further intrusion from University management. The introduction of new performance management measures and a commitment to 'continuous improvement' only increased the anxiety felt by staff. University management reassured academic staff that they could 'ordinarily expect their duties to remain unchanged ... as long as their research performance remains strong.'⁴⁸ Yet, in some cases, researchers were now expected to add teaching duties to their workloads. Many in the IAS had not been in front of a class in decades; some never had. The prospect of entering the bear-pit of undergraduate teaching while maintaining their research output was overwhelming. Others were prepared to soldier on but resented what they saw as a lack of support to help them adapt. The reverse was also true. Staff whose research failed to meet expectations could not automatically expect to 'fall back' to a teaching role.

A few disgruntled staff members, mainly from the IAS, were bold enough to confront Chubb directly. In his office, they found no quarter. As Chubb remembered: they arrived 'clutching pieces of paper that said they didn't have to do very much.'⁴⁹ They left with an unequivocal understanding of the status of their old contracts. The certainties of the past were gone. Chubb's apparent lack of sympathy fostered a feeling among staff that he was prepared to cast aside decades of corporate and scholarly experience in the quest for institutional renewal.

When they recall this period of the University's history, former ANU staff express anger, exasperation and even guilt. Deeply upset by the changes to the higher education system in general, they were also dismayed at how the University had treated them in particular. Some staff wondered if the IAS had been a victim of its own success, as the 2004 Review had delicately implied. Could they have done more to save the old model of the IAS? Could they have resisted the changes more forcefully? They also expressed concern for the next generation of scholars who had

⁴⁸ *Operational improvements...*, p. 14

⁴⁹ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*.

less time to devote to their research and were now expected to earn income for the University by winning grants or earning consultancy fees.

One of the few ANU academics to write about their misgivings about the direction of the University was the historian Brij Lal. A member of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies since 1990, Lal had spent three decades as an active observer, recorder, and participant in the political life of his birthplace, Fiji. He had been an equally keen observer of the changes to academic life. But, as he neared the end of his career, he could no longer contain his disillusionment:

I've seen the best. I've worked with the best. They're all gone. So there's a sense of isolation and a definite sense of loss The sense of community, the sense of being together in the same business, of looking out for each other, is gone. We are a much more atomised group now, harassed and hassled, all furiously chasing the research dollar. I don't find the present culture of the academy satisfying any more. To justify your existence every year to academic bean counters is not what I joined the academy for in the first place. To tell the truth, I find the whole thing repugnant. We historians don't operate on an annual cycle, nor should we. The value of our work will be judged in the fullness of time, not tomorrow or the day after. I refuse to accept that bureaucrats are the best judges of the value of the work we do.⁵⁰

Jim Fox, Director of RSPAS between 1999 and 2006, was similarly concerned about the new constraints and rules imposed on the academic enterprise. '[M]odern managers and administrators have taken on too much of the decision making in universities and research centres, decisions that once were the territory of those engaged in fundamental exploration and discovery', he says. Yet, he is quick to say that this is not a whimsical moan for the 'good ole days', but a genuine concern at the loss of 'excitement and imaginative opportunities for younger researchers', as well as for everyone who relies on university teaching and learning.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Doug Munro and Jack Corbett (eds.), *Bearing witness: essays in honour of Brij V. Lal*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2017, p. 61.

⁵¹ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Jim Fox*, Emeritus Faculty Oral History Interview, 2015.

Not everyone saw it this way. A younger generation of staff, students and early career academics were more sanguine about the changes. Some of the old guard saw their employment in the IAS as a birthright and stayed on well past retirement age as genial, but mostly unproductive, staff members. Many Heads of School didn't know what to do with them or took the path of least resistance and did nothing. Academic leaders who chose to take action had to have difficult conversations without recourse to a performance management process that might have strengthened their resolve. For the next generation of scholars, the consequences were significant. With a tenured position in a research school as rare as the proverbial hen's tooth, young scholars eked out an existence as a research assistant or as a casual tutor or lecturer until something more lasting came along. It rarely did. With post-doctoral fellowships similarly hard to come by, talented scholars went elsewhere or abandoned thoughts of an academic career altogether.

Not that young researchers thought that the reforms would herald a golden age. In 2011, four graduates of the ANU's Early Career Academic Program (a course launched by the ANU Centre for Career Development in 2008 to help aspiring researchers build their careers) created the Network for Early Career Academics at the ANU (NECTAR).⁵² They developed the group in response to the question: "Could it be that the only thing preventing us from forging amazing academic careers is ourselves?" The emergence of groups such as NECTAR (which today has over 2,500 members) was a pragmatic and practical response to changing working conditions. Resisting the turn towards casual and contract labour, as well as the sector's reliance on short-term funding, was futile. Young academics could best cope with the vicissitudes of a university career by helping each other from the inside rather than by challenging the system itself.

As the campus wrestled with implementing the new regime, the Vice-Chancellor's public reputation soared. Among students, his willingness to listen to them had burnished his status as a paternal figure. They had even forgiven him for the increase in HECS. 'Big Daddy Chubb gets five more years', announced *Woroni* in 2007 when the University council unanimously agreed to extend his contract. 'Lovers

⁵² The ANU Centre for Career Development launched the Early Career Academic Program in 2008.

of rotundity and wise leadership in tertiary affairs are in high spirits with the news', the article continued.⁵³ Chubb took advantage of the Federal Government's generous capital funding to help pay for a much-needed building and refurbishment program. New constructions, some with bold and innovative designs, gave a physical expression of the ANU's rising confidence. Chubb's detractors muttered that their Vice-Chancellor was more interested in buildings and organisational structures than the people who had to work within them.

One University

A perennial challenge for every vice-chancellor of the ANU has been to bind the University's discrete parts together; a task made more difficult by its anomalous operational structure. Chubb's reforms to the operation of the University and the introduction of the College system helped bridge the gulf between teaching and research. Yet this was far from the only structural complexity the ANU inherited from its historical foundations.

From the beginning, each research school operated, in large measure, as independent entities. Over the years, they developed distinctive identities and cultures, reinforced by their separate administrative departments, budgets and strategic plans. Few Vice-Chancellors had dared challenge their self-rule, lest they disrupt the special amalgam that had enabled their world-class contributions to the national research effort. For their part, Directors of the research schools moved staunchly against anything that might threaten their sovereignty. Unmoved by such tradition, Chubb hoped to create a new ANU, where the university's disparate parts united in a common purpose and mission. Changes to strategic management and the new organisational restructure had resolved some of this fragmentation. But reshaping the identities of the research schools that had been decades in the making would not happen overnight.

Some research schools were more protective of their independence than others. As a foundation school, the John Curtin School of Medical Research was

⁵³ *Woroni*, 1 November 2007.

justifiably proud of its stellar achievements and the esteem its research had bestowed upon the ANU. While relations with the rest of the University were mostly cordial, memories of previous difficulties were never far from mind. The biggest threat to the School's autonomy had come during the 1970s and 1980s when the Minister of Education, Peter Baldwin, attempted to shift financial control of the School, first to the NHMRC, and then, more worryingly, to the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services. Discussions spiralled into a public debate about university independence and academic freedom. While the ANU rallied to protect its autonomy, members of the School felt that a lack of strategic leadership on behalf of Vice-Chancellor Laurie Nichols had left them vulnerable to government interference. In time, the School's bruised morale would heal. But the imbroglio left a lingering question about what protection being part of the ANU actually afforded.⁵⁴

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the School turned to less abstract matters that, if left unchecked, would affect both the quality and quantity of its research output. The original JCSMR buildings were state-of-the-art when they were completed in 1957 but after four decades were now no longer fit for modern medical research. The long-awaited new building opened on 14 May 2009. Its striking, post-modern design was a fitting symbol of the School's new confidence. Befitting the School's international status and the generous funding from the Labor Government, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was on hand to celebrate the occasion. It was an important moment for the Vice-Chancellor, coming as it did towards the end of his tenure. As Chubb approached the new building for the first time, he paused at the entrance. He noticed that the frosted signage stencilled onto the glass only referred to the JCSMR; the ANU logo was nowhere to be seen. Chubb was apoplectic. "Just whose University do they think they belong to?" he fumed.⁵⁵ Discussions with the Director of the School ensued and the signage was corrected. About the same time, the JCSMR, some sixty years after its creation, finally added the university logo to its official letterhead. These were small but symbolic

⁵⁴ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University*, pp. 351-6, 411.

⁵⁵ Jane O'Dwyer to author, pers. comm, 18 August 2020.

adjustments. And there was still much work to do. When Chubb departed at the end of 2010, he noted that ‘cultural change was still underway.’⁵⁶

Legacy

Under Chubb’s leadership, even as the ANU struggled through the most difficult structural change in its history, the University expanded at an unprecedented rate. It became richer, with consolidated annual income topping \$1 billion by the end of the decade. Student enrolments doubled from 8,425 in 2001 to almost 17,000 in 2010, a quarter of whom were international students, an increase of 200 per cent from 2001.

Yet new buildings and bursting lecture theatres did not trigger a corresponding growth in academic or professional staff. The number of academics did rise, but at a slower rate of about 40 per cent (from 1,066 in 2001 to 1506 in 2010).⁵⁷ Overall, the number of staff in 2010 had only returned to the levels the University enjoyed in the mid-1990s.⁵⁸ The reduction in positions denoted as ‘research-only’ is more difficult to quantify, in part because the University stopped using this terminology when it transitioned to the college system expected all academic staff to be ‘research-active’. It is also hard to find consistent data. The University’s *Annual Report* stopped publishing staff figures according to research status or their employment status (tenured, casual or fixed-term contract) in 2004.

Few could deny the impact of Chubb’s leadership or the necessity of some of the changes he introduced. However, at a farewell dinner held at University House in February 2011, a heartfelt speech delivered by Chancellor Gareth Evans illustrated the disjunction between the University Executive and the rest of the staff. ‘When the next history of the ANU is written’, Evans said with characteristic enthusiasm, ‘we know that Ian Chubb is going to be right up there with the legends, and that future generations will talk about the three C’s – Coombs, Crawford and Chubb.’⁵⁹ On this

⁵⁶ Peter Stewart, *Interview with Ian Chubb*.

⁵⁷ *ANU: Annual Report*, 2001, p. 8; *ANU: Annual Report*, 2010, p.6.

⁵⁸ *ANU: Annual Report*, 1995, p. 26.

⁵⁹ G. Evans, ‘An Enduring Legacy: Ian Chubb’s Leadership of ANU’, Address delivered at University House, 17 February 2011.

point, he was on safe ground. He went on to say that the 'change process' had been achieved with an 'extraordinary degree of harmony, stability and productivity.' Even to Chubb's most ardent supporters, this was risible. However necessary the reforms, however vital to the university's future, the implementation process had been halting, difficult and sometimes toxic. Some areas of the University adapted quickly and had begun to thrive. Others struggled to recover, having been wholly restructured or amalgamated. Some had been erased altogether. Most had lost some of their most experienced scholars.

Lal, for instance, moved to the newly formed School of Culture, History and Language in the College of Asia and the Pacific. Unable to embrace the altered academic landscape with any enthusiasm, he retired in 2015. Lal, and others who left during this period in the University's history, departed with their heads held high, proud of their contributions to their fields of expertise. Yet, at the same time, they mourned for a University they once championed but could no longer recognise. The decline of the IAS as an independent entity meant that the ANU had lost a distinctive facet of its identity. Lal felt the loss personally but also saw that it had damaged the University's special status. 'Now the ANU is simply one among several universities, *primus inter pares*', he wrote in 2012. 'This perhaps is the most depressing change I have witnessed in my time at the ANU over the last two decades: the steady diminution of a great institution, still leading the way but just barely.'⁶⁰

For many senior staff, the 'merger' was little more than an economic rationalist attempt to reduce the number of tenured, research-only staff, now deemed a luxury few Australian universities could afford. While the ANU remained a research-intensive University, the funding arrangements that underpin that work had changed radically. The ANU still received the Block Grant, better known today by its formal title, the National Institutes Grant (NIG). In this sense, the legacy of the IAS lived on. However, what had once been the financial bedrock on which the IAS had been built, was no longer the mainstay of the University's funding base. In the 1990s, it constituted about 50 per cent of annual revenue. By 2010, having not kept up with inflation or the rising cost of research, NIG funding had fallen to around 17 per cent

⁶⁰ Brij Lal, 'Coombs 4240: A Room of My Own', in Brij Lal, *Intersections: History, Memory, Discipline*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2012, p. 131

of the University's annual income. Today it is less than 15 per cent.⁶¹ In a political climate hostile to anomalies and special cases, even this is under threat. The impact of replacing long-term funding with short-term 'contestable' grant money on research at the ANU has yet to be subjected to any rigorous study.

In 2010, the University persisted with the notion that the IAS had not been erased but reimagined. Chubb appointed Mandy Thomas, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), to lead a working party to oversee the development of the 'New IAS'. Little seems to have come of these deliberations. Today, very few references to the IAS, other than historical ones, can be found. In the end, there were no announcements, no celebratory events, no accolades in the press, no speeches or toasts. Nothing. It simply faded from view.

The IAS was an extraordinary creation of the postwar world, sustained for over half a century by successive governments who shared a bi-partisan faith in independent and unfettered research to foster national prosperity. It had forged a unique, enterprising and productive research culture unlike anywhere else in the country. The IAS wasn't perfect. But it deserved a better send-off than this. The lack of any openhearted acknowledgement of the IAS and its great legacy slowed the institutional healing that so desperately needed to occur. It has left a scar, still too sensitive to touch.

Chubb's legacy is profound. Over a decade he shifted the ecology of a University that had resisted major reform for over 40 years. The transformation had not come easy. Nor had it come without controversy or the loss of experienced staff unhappy with the university's new direction and demands. As Chubb himself recorded in the 2010 *Annual Report*: 'Over the past decade, the University has undergone significant financial and structural change – some of it hard and challenging but all of it necessary.'⁶²

Accolades flowed for the departing Vice-Chancellor, and prestigious job offers arrived before his term was up. In 2011, Chubb was named ACT Australian of the Year to recognise his services to tertiary education and university governance. In April, Labor's Minister for Innovation, Kim Carr, formally appointed Chubb as Chief

⁶¹ Figures taken from ANU *Annual Reports*, 1995 to 2020.

⁶² ANU: *Annual Report*, 2010, p. 4.

Scientist of Australia. He replaced Penny Sackett (former Director of the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics) and held the position for the next five years.⁶³

The other Ian

Life after the bold and buccaneering Ian Chubb was always going to be different. Outwardly, at least, the University could hardly have selected a more contrasting replacement.⁶⁴ The new vice-chancellor shared a first name, but that was about all. A tall, rangy redhead with a thick, paintbrush moustache, Ian Robert Young was introverted, unflappable and unfailingly polite. The transition from the swearsy, volcanic Chubb took some getting used to. 'I'm really boring, it's true', Young told a reporter from the *Canberra Times* sent to write a profile piece on the new vice-chancellor.⁶⁵ After a decade of upheaval, the University Council may well have hoped that a less flamboyant leader might bring some much-needed calm to the ANU. His five years at the helm would turn out to be anything but.



Ian Young, Vice-Chancellor of the ANU from 2011 to 2015. Image: ANU Photography.

⁶³ <https://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/2011/04/new-chief-scientist-appointed>

⁶⁴ Gareth Evans, *Incorrigible Optimist: a political memoir*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2017, p. 307.

⁶⁵ Emma Macdonald, 'Fear the Music may Stop', *Canberra Times*, 13 October 2012, p. 1.

A talented oceanographer academic, Young had been Vice-Chancellor of Swinburne University since 2003. He gained national attention for his ambitious transformation of the predominately teaching institute (it had been a technical college until 1992) into a leading university with a focussed research program. 'It's not about incremental growth', he wrote when he started in the role, 'this is about a massive expansion of Swinburne's budget and research performance'. During his tenure, Swinburne entered the international rankings for the first time, doubled its revenue, more than doubled its research citations, and significantly increased the number of staff with a PhD. Young also expanded online education services in a joint venture with SEEK, an early Australian-based online employment service company. By 2014, with an annual turnover of almost \$30 million, Swinburne Online was the fourth fastest-growing company in Australia.⁶⁶ Some aspects of the reorientation were controversial, such as introducing a performance-based salary scheme intended to 'motivate staff in the pursuit of excellence.'⁶⁷

Young represented a new kind of vice-chancellor for the ANU. He was more disciplined than his predecessor, less likely to govern by calculated hunch or gut instinct. Where Chubb, in his attempts to break the University's entrenched power structures, had ridden roughshod over long-established decision-making bodies, such as Academic Board, Young favoured an 'audit culture' that encouraged more disciplined and data-driven decision-making.

The swift, sharp swing of the axe

Young's term at the ANU started well enough. Those who met the new vice-chancellor liked his methodical approach and his respect for the ANU's unique origins. As Young explained:

⁶⁶ Tim Dodd, 'SEEK hits the jackpot in Swinburne University venture', *Australian Financial Review*, 23 August 2015, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Julie Hare, 'Swinburne hits the brakes on motivation bonus scheme', *Australian*, 1 May 2013. The scheme was suspended in 2013.

I researched the history of ANU before I came here because I think that the history of institutions are really important. They shape the culture, they shape the people within them and the history determines the nature of the institution. The history of the ANU explains a lot about where it is today...⁶⁸

Barely three months into the job, Young was brought forcefully back into the present. In June, as a political furore over the federal government's carbon pricing legislation played out in the media, ANU climate scientists reported receiving threatening emails and phone messages, including death threats, about their research.⁶⁹ While some researchers upgraded security protocols and even deleted their online profiles, the episode demonstrated the importance and independence of the University's research and its capacity to threaten powerful interests. For Young, a leader less accustomed to the limelight, it was a dramatic illustration of his elevated status and the new skills it demanded. His time at Swinburne had not escaped media attention, but leading a national institution with close ties to the federal government required a constant and careful dialogue with the media.

Fortunately, better news was on the horizon. In October 2011, Young basked in some reflected glory when an affable scholar from the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics won the Nobel Prize for Physics. In a stunning result for the University, Professor Brian Schmidt was jointly awarded this pre-eminent award for discovering that the Universe is expanding at an accelerating rate, overturning the widely accepted theory that the expansion was slowing down. Schmidt became an international figure, his image appearing in newspapers and science magazines around the world.⁷⁰ If the new Vice-Chancellor seemed pragmatic and focussed, Schmidt offered a balancing figure: enthusiastic and curiosity-driven.

More earthly matters soon demanded Young's attention as he dedicated himself to 'getting to grips with the complexity of the organisation.'⁷¹ Like all CEOs, Young wanted to make his mark. He set about developing a comprehensive strategic

⁶⁸ Martyn Pearce, 'The nature of things', *ANU Reporter*, Vo. 42, No. 2, 2010, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Geoff Maslen, 'Australia: Death threats for climate researchers', *University World News*, 12 June 2011.

⁷⁰ *ANU Reporter*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2011, pp. 11-12.

⁷¹ *ANU Reporter*, ANU Press Release, 1 March 2011.

vision that charted where he wanted the ANU to be by the end of the decade. Released in August 2011, *ANU by 2020* restated many of the ideas that had motivated the University's leaders for over half a century. Young wanted to preserve the ANU's 'distinctive mission' with a plan that was 'both aspirational and pragmatic', one that builds 'on our enviable history and outlines an ambitious set of goals for the future.'⁷²

ANU by 2020 contained more than a whiff of Young's belief that the ANU had been wrestling on its laurels and now needed a gentle push. Specifically, Young wanted to see an improvement in productivity ('performance culture'), the modernisation of administrative procedures and IT systems neglected during Chubb's term, and an expansion of revenue-generating assets such as on-campus residential accommodation. It was also becoming apparent that Young spoke a different language to his predecessor. Chubb had used his fair share of managerial jargon, but Young embraced it with fresh enthusiasm. 'Excellence is a much-overused word today', Young wrote in the 24-page document that deployed the noun no less than 36 times. Yet '**true excellence**', he continued, 'required remarkable people – the people this plan will nurture and attract to the ANU'. Buzzwords aside, staff responded well to the plan's focus on increasing research capacity, attracting more staff and boosting philanthropic contributions to the University. Usual for a document of this nature, the opaque language was set against a remarkably precise series of indicators against which the Vice-Chancellor would measure success. These included: ensuring that the majority of staff were 'highly research-active' as measured by an increase their Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) rankings from 4 to 5; improving student feedback and 'overall satisfaction' ratings, improving the number of staff listed as Fellows of learned academics, increasing the percentage of international students on externally funded scholarships, improving equity and access figures, and securing more money from outside of government sources in the form of 'transformative gifts' of over \$10 million. At every level, Young wanted the ANU to exceed the figures posted by his

⁷² *ANU by 2020*, 2011, p. 2.

competitors, namely Australia's eight largest universities known as the Group of Eight (Go8).⁷³

By the end of his first year, much of the early optimism had vanished as worsening economic conditions forced a revision of Young's original plan. Falling investment revenue, a reduction in the Block Grant, and rising salary costs saw the University's income decline by millions. Initially, Young stuck to his plan and allocated some \$10 million towards 'strategic academic appointments', marketing, alumni activities, and the renewal of the University's outdated Information Technology systems. Even with the economic downturn and Young's targeted spending program, the University still generated a surplus of \$14 million. This alone was a significant achievement. But the financial outlook had changed. Uncertain of the government's future funding commitments, Young changed tack and announced a new strategy to preserve the current surplus and save an additional \$40 million early in 2012.

Confusion reigned among staff. The University was not in debt. Indeed, it commanded over \$1 billion in assets. Employees had just received a 4.5 per cent pay rise, and the University's rankings were trending upwards. Nevertheless, young warned that the slim surplus was not enough if the ANU wanted to remain internationally competitive. As he told officials from the National Tertiary Education Union: 'We could slip into deficit just like that.'⁷⁴ By the time Young reassured the ANU's almost 4,000 employees that 'this will not simply be a "cost-saving" exercise' but a 'financial repositioning to ensure ongoing excellence', no one believed him. Some staff grumbled, and only partly in jest, whether it was worth re-hiring 'the big man' (Ian Chubb) to steady the ship.

Senior staff members recalled that the University had not seen such radical changes to higher education funding since the late 1990s when the Howard government made a series of deep sector-wide cuts. Back then, staff met Terrell's attempts to cut back (including his infamously unsuccessful attempt to cut Latin) with week-long strikes, walk-outs, sit-ins and picket lines.⁷⁵ Yet, in 2012, the

⁷³ ANU by 2020, 2011.

⁷⁴ Emma Macdonald, 'Swift, sharp swing of the axe', *Canberra Times*, 31 March 2012, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Emma Macdonald, 'Swift, sharp swing of the axe', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 March 2012, p.7.

challenging economic environment was not the only reason for Young's new financial plan. He told staff that the ANU's spending needed to align with the Group of Eight (Go8) and that a management consulting company would help the University 'commence a program of administrative business process re-engineering' along with a 'strategic reduction in staff costs.' By now staff were better attuned to Young's coded expression. A detailed translation as to what he was really driving at was unnecessary.

Two seemingly immutable laws govern most university budgets. First, original and innovative research is more expensive than teaching. Second, salary expenses are the highest single operating cost, typically taking over half the annual budget. In 2012, the ANU's salary budget represented 59 per cent of total revenue, compared to 56.32 per cent for the Go8. Young never convincingly explained why the composition of the ANU's budget suddenly needed to mirror that of the other universities. Staff pointed out that using the Go8 as a benchmark failed to consider the ANU's intensive research focus and the higher staffing and infrastructure expenses that came with it. Forcing the ANU into line with the spending patterns of the larger but less research-intensive universities threatened to undermine the very distinctiveness that Young wanted to preserve. Observers wondered if the outsider truly understood the uniqueness of the institution he was trying to govern. Steve Darwin from the National Tertiary Education Union suspected another motive: 'Unfortunately, we have come to the point where a managerial badge of honour is the size of the surplus. What we cannot forget is the unique nature of our national University and the fact that people's careers and livelihoods are at stake.'⁷⁶

The Vice-Chancellor dug in. In his communications to staff, Young wrote about the 'significant shift in the mix of skills of our staff' that needed to occur. He charged his Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Marnie Hughes-Warrington, with conducting a campus-wide audit to trim inefficiencies wherever they might be found. Young explained that a decision about the staff and discipline areas 'which could no longer be retained' would be made through an 'assessment of relative performance' based on publication quality and quantity (ERA criteria), grant performance, and teaching

⁷⁶ Emma Macdonald, 'Swift, sharp swing of the axe', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 March 2012, p 7.

quality and quantity. Unwittingly, Young had triggered a process that set individual staff against each other as they competed against one another for fewer positions. In some cases, the process was exacting, with staff sent letters asking them to account for their performance. Entire departments and discipline areas wondered if they would even survive the process. In the end, few areas of the University were spared from offering up their 'excess staff', mainly through 'voluntary redundancies', the now ubiquitous management tool, or by natural attrition, which meant that retiring staff would not be replaced. Certain areas of the University received a greater share of the Vice-Chancellor's attention than others.

The School of Music

Established in 1965, the Canberra School of Music flourished under its foundation Director, Ernest Llewellyn, a violinist and former concertmaster of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. From humble premises in the suburb of Manuka, Llewellyn wanted the School to be Australia's answer to the acclaimed Julliard School, an elite private performing arts conservatorium in New York. The School's reputation soon spread beyond Canberra, boosted by the appointment of some outstanding performers and teachers, including the violinist Vincent Edwards, the tenor William Herbert, the cellist Laurie Kennedy and the pianist and composer Larry Sitsky. In 1976, it moved to a new building on the grounds of the old Canberra High School, adjacent to the School of Art and the ANU. Celebrated as a symbol of Canberra's cultural maturity, the 1500-seat theatre (later named Llewellyn Hall) became a major venue for concerts by local and visiting performers, as well as the new location for the University's graduation ceremonies.⁷⁷

Despite Canberra's growing cultural confidence, the independence and sustainability of small community-based institutions like the schools of Music and Art were increasingly precarious. To protect their integrity and futures, the two schools decided to merge. In 1988, they formed the Canberra Institute of the Arts (CITA), an autonomous statutory authority. Shortly after the change, Federal Education

⁷⁷ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University*, p. 348.

Minister John Dawkins, as part of a nationwide reform and expansion of higher education, signalled his intention that the Institute should join the ANU and increase its research focus. In reality, the CITA had little choice, but nor did it want to miss out. Similar schools and conservatoriums around the country were being absorbed by universities and winning the right to award degrees. Before Dawkins issued his directive to 'amalgamate or perish', members of the Canberra music community saw advantages to joining the ANU. Stephen Wild, Chairman of the ACT Chapter of Musicological Society of Australia, wrote in 1985 that joining the ANU was a chance for musicians to receive a 'far richer education in music and the humanities' than was possible at a conservatorium.⁷⁸ Amalgamation offered security in uncertain times and was widely seen as one of the happier outcomes of the Dawkins reforms. In 1992, the ANU celebrated the merger with an open day and an evening concert by the Canberra School of Music Symphony Orchestra in Llewellyn Hall. The future looked bright for both parties. Under the terms of the union, the Institute had a degree of autonomy like the research schools. Importantly, the University recognised that performance and practice-based assessment required a different approach to the appointment and promotion of staff and evaluation of students. The addition of art and music as academic disciplines made the ANU a more vibrant and comprehensive institution, better able to rival the more diverse offerings of the larger state universities. The University saw no threat to its reputation or academic standards. As the Institute received a portion of its funding from the ACT government, the merger was an opportunity to foster closer ties with the local community.⁷⁹

Yet, there were challenges. For a university that measured itself mainly through research, musical performance and art practice were unfamiliar forms of academic achievement. Would the pressure to research and publish stymie the commitment to performance? As historians Foster and Varghese suggested, 'The PhD had often dulled the creative spirit in the humanities and social sciences. Would it have a similar effect in the creative arts?' In any event, they continued: 'If amalgamation was really to work, the University would need to acknowledge new

⁷⁸ Letters to the Editor, *Canberra Times*, 21 August 1985, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University*, pp. 347-351.

measures which gave such activities the same status as research.⁸⁰ The more watchful members of the Institute also knew that the merger made inevitable their dependence on the ANU's strategic direction and funding. Yet, in the early eagerness for the union, these complex issues were set aside. And, for a few years at least, the School of Music extended its role as a vital component in the local music scene, facilitating student and staff participation in activities beyond what might strictly be required to meet the University's responsibilities. In the good times, the University and the School were content to let their different approaches to research and teaching lie. Those differences grew into a major source of the School's financial woes and its isolation from the rest of the University.

The School of Music favoured the conservatorium model of teaching (also known as the Bauhaus model) that relied on smaller, studio-based classes combined with one-on-one tuition. Staff at the School argued that while this model was more costly (requiring a higher staff-student ratio), it was vital to maintaining the School's reputation and its commitment to producing elite performers. The University allocated funds to the School based on its student enrolments but provided some extra money in recognition of the higher cost of music education. Still, the allocations were not enough, and the School slipped into deficit. In the early 2000s, the School's financial outlook worsened when the ACT Government began winding back its regular contributions as part of broader spending cuts.⁸¹

Measuring the School's commitment to performance against traditional research outputs (which some saw as irrelevant) was another source of conflict. Those outside the School looked on with envy at the small classes and the lower expectations to publish research in scholarly journals. They overlooked the time and dedication required of its musician-academics to extend their skills as players and composers.

When the School of Music joined the Faculty of Arts in 2003, its debts came with it. Rising tensions over the cost of subsidising the School (combined with

⁸⁰ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University*, p. 350.

⁸¹ Protests from students and staff in 1998 against the Carnell Government's decision to cut funding to the School of Music forced a temporary back down, but the political trajectory was clear. *Woroni*, 1 July 1998 & 1 October 1998.

shrinking budgets throughout the University) brought the matter before the University Council. It was clear that something needed to change. In particular, if the range of instruments in which the School offered advanced teaching was to continue, instrument tuition needed to shift away from the academic salaries model (introduced in 1992) towards the use of teaching-only staff or sessional tutors. Once again, the University avoided the difficult discussions that might have started a more gradual realignment in the School's pedagogical, strategic and financial direction.

As students and money became harder to find, the School soon found itself in a vicious circle. The worsening budget meant the School spent less on public programs that might attract the next generation of musicians and the funding that came with them. A 2004 external report by arts journalist Andrea Stretton criticised the School's 'laissez-faire' approach to promotion, especially at local high schools. She expressed sympathy for the School's staff, writing that heavy workloads and a lack of leadership had led to a 'culture of isolated self-reliance and resignation to a slightly chaotic structure.' Preoccupied with the biggest organisational restructure in the University's history, Chubb did not confront the matter until four years later. 'We have a problem', he said with characteristic directness in 2008, 'fewer students are enrolling for classical music tuition ... salaries swallow up nearly 100 per cent of the budget ... It can't continue ... student preferences are changing, and student interests are changing in ways that need to be matched by resources.'⁸² Faced with the prospect of having their salaries reduced to match their teaching loads, many staff considered leaving the School. Senior lecturer in violin, Barbara Gilby, reflected a common view among her colleagues: 'Music schools don't belong in universities. Their funding is predicated on hundreds of students to one lecturer and those economies of scale can never be applied to music.' There is a 'complete lack of understanding on the part of ANU hierarchy of what its music staff actually do', she added.⁸³

In an attempt to set the School on a more sustainable path, Chubb established a \$1 million endowment to support community engagement programs, revamped teaching operations (including the phasing out of unpopular instruments)

⁸² Diana Streak, 'Discord over future of music institution', *Canberra Times*, 9 February 2008, p. 5.

⁸³ Diana Streak, 'University out of tune with music role: Staff', *Canberra Times*, 7 February 2008, p. 4.

and the voluntary redundancy of at least nine staff.⁸⁴ Four years later, Young found that little changed, only that the School's debt had ballooned to almost \$3 million. Echoing the sentiments of his predecessor, he said the School must adapt in order to become both academically and financially viable. He proposed a controversial new curriculum and a radical reduction in staff. Twenty-four teaching positions would be reduced to thirteen, and two administrative positions would be cut. Alarming, the University intended to make almost all of the specialist instrument (including voice) teachers redundant, only re-hiring those with vocational skills. Young proposed that external tutors and casual staff provide one-to-one tuition. The School would allocate a Professional Development Allowance (PDA) of \$600 per semester to each student that allowed them to pay for private tuition (in person or online), attend a master class, or learn a new piece of music software.⁸⁵

Some staff members from within the School recognised the need for change. Musicologist and Chair of the School's education committee, Jonathan Powles, said that most graduates do not become elite players, and the number of jobs for orchestral musicians was shrinking. It was time to 'have the debate about what sort of music education prepares graduates for a changing musical environment.' The new curriculum, which he helped design, would prepare them for a competitive music industry and a changing 'technologically informed environment'.

Young epitomised the modern corporate business manager. To his critics, he was a leader fixated with performance metrics, indifferent to the human cost of reform. The School's almost \$3 million deficit was 'more than the whole annual budget of the School of Philosophy, which ranks sixth in the world', Young explained to a media conference in June 2012. 'Deficits of his level are unsustainable and create an unacceptable burden for the rest of the university community.'⁸⁶ In an opinion piece in the *Canberra Times*, Young was even more explicit: 'To be clear,

⁸⁴ Diana Streak, '\$1m for school of music, with strings attached', *Canberra Times*, 29 March 2008, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Marjorie Merryman, 'ANU should change its tune: why online lessons do not replace live music', *The Conversation*, 31 May 2012.

⁸⁶ www.abc.net.au/mews/2012-06-15/anu-school-of-music-cuts-to-go-ahead/4073276

every dollar that is moved to music is moved away from students and their teachers in disciplines such as the languages, classics and archaeology.¹⁸⁷

Young's tough language fuelled a groundswell of misunderstanding and resentment, mainly from staff in the College of Arts and Social Sciences who felt they were subsidising a profligate, undisciplined and underperforming department.⁸⁸ It also scotched any chance of finding more innovative alternatives to the School budget woes. Bickering between departments over resource allocations was nothing new. The distribution of money across universities is complex and tailored to the needs of each discipline. It is rarely distributed equally. The cost of some technical equipment can run into many millions, for instance, so too can the cost of maintaining library resources. Some courses can be undertaken with higher student-staff ratios, others cannot.

Young's announcement provoked an angry backlash across many parts of the University and the broader Canberra music community.⁸⁹ The University received hundreds of submissions in response to the planned changes, including a petition with 25,000 signatures called on him to abandon the cuts.⁹⁰ At a public protest rally, School of Music graduate Tegan Peemoeller told the ABC that she would not have enrolled in the School unless the renowned harpist Alice Giles was on staff. Alice 'is more or less a rock star', she said, 'there are very few like her in the world that can combine musicality with technicality in the way she does.'⁹¹ But if the protestors, petition signers, and letter writers imagined they might unsettle the Vice-Chancellor, they were wrong. If anything, the reaction only stiffened his already diamond-hard resolve. As an interim measure, Young did agree to cover some of the financial shortfall but indicated that private philanthropy would have to play a bigger role in underwriting the School's budget. The staff cuts and the adoption of the new

⁸⁷ Ian Young, 'School's future must be secured', *Canberra Times*, 15 May 2012, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Over the years, the School's research output had become a major point of contention with CASS management. See, Andrew Podger, *ANU School of Music Consultations: Final Report*, 2016, pp. 8-9, 26.

⁸⁹ The *Canberra Times* also published letters that supported the University's position, with one contributor critical of the School's 'underloaded and underworked' staff. Letters to the Editor, *Canberra Times*, 5 May 2012, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Letters to the Editor, *Canberra Times*, 8 May 2012, p. 10; Letters to the Editor, *Canberra Times*, 17 May 2012, p. 14; Nicholas Brown, *A History of Canberra*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 170.

⁹¹ www.abc.net.au/mews/2012-06-15/anu-school-of-music-cuts-to-go-ahead/4073276

curriculum, however, were not negotiable. By the end of the year, the University had informed nine music academics, including Giles, that they had been unsuccessful in the recruitment rounds.⁹²

Young appeared isolated at this troubling time, a situation made worse by the high turnover in senior staff. Within a year of his arrival, all of Chubb's executive appointments had resigned or moved on. Young was left without an experienced team to guide him. Chancellor Evans, a skilled political tactician himself, might have counselled his embattled Vice-Chancellor to adopt a more conciliatory tone. Instead, he backed his man. 'It's a competitive environment ... The ANU cannot afford to continue to peddle at the same pace', Evans said. Only later did he concede that the 'lumpy process' might have been handled more carefully.⁹³ Young, by contrast, was unrepentant. 'It hasn't been easy, but would I do it again?' he said in an interview in October 2012, 'Yes, because it simply has to be done. And in the end, I am prepared to be judged on how it turns out.'⁹⁴

To manage the transition, the University recruited Peter Tregear, an experienced teacher and academic administrator from Monash University's Academy of Performing Arts. It was never going to be an easy task. The disruption had left the remaining staff deeply unsettled. Union membership had risen to record highs while enrolments were on the way to record lows. Then, in early 2013, the School of Music began to recede from the headlines. For now, Young could focus on what he felt were more important and pressing matters. The fallout from the imbroglio, on the other hand, would take a little longer to bear its bitter fruit.

Education Innovation

No sooner had Young put the School of Music crises behind him than another loomed into view. The 2013 federal budget, handed down by Federal Treasurer Wayne Swan, diverted more than \$2 billion from the tertiary sector to primary and secondary schools as part of the Gonski education reforms. Universities faced the

⁹² Emma Macdonald, 'Frozen out: sacked ANU academics tell their stories', *Canberra Times*, 2 November 2012, p. 4.

⁹³ Emma Macdonald, 'Fear the music might stop', *Canberra Times*, 13 October 2012, pp. 1, 4.

⁹⁴ Emma Macdonald, 'Fear the music might stop', *Canberra Times*, 13 October 2012, pp. 1, 4.

cuts through a two-year efficiency dividend. The Government saved another \$237 million by ending the bonuses for up-front or voluntary payments of HECS-HELP debts. Swan's budget sparked protests on university campuses nationwide. ANU's share of the deficit amounted to \$50 million over two years.⁹⁵ For Young, it was another blow in his attempt to rebuild confidence and trust after the disruptions of the last 12 months.

Enrolling more students to make up for the funding shortfall was out of the question. Instead, to deal with the cuts, Young announced an early retirement scheme, an overhaul of administrative services, and a plan to make the campus more energy efficient. However, his decision to increase parking fees to earn an extra million dollars for the university triggered a disproportionately passionate discussion among staff and students alike.⁹⁶

The immediate budget cuts were only part of the problem for the ANU. Broader changes to how the Government funded the tertiary sector were beginning to take effect. The Bradley Reforms had recommended that universities be allowed to enrol as many undergraduates as they wished in order to increase the number of 18 to 24-year-olds with a degree. The caps on student numbers removed progressively from 2009, and many universities embraced the changes to increase their revenue. The so-called 'demand-driven' funding method created an incentive to teach the highest number of students in the cheapest way possible. Class sizes swelled, as did the government expenditure. By 2012, an additional domestic 127,000 enrolments had been recorded across the country, an increase of 23 per cent. Government outlay to the tertiary sector spiked from \$5.9 billion in 2007 to \$9.46 billion in 2012.

With a percentage of the funding allocated for research activity, the expansion of student places, in theory, also expanded the research budget. However, this funding model did not suit smaller, research-intensive universities like the ANU, with a limited capacity to increase their proportion of research funding. As Young explained to the *ANU Reporter*:

⁹⁵ Larissa Nicholson, 'ANU steels for \$51m cut in funding', *Canberra Times*, 22 May 2013, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Emma Macdonald, 'ANU staff may strike over cuts: University defends increase in parking fees', *Canberra Times*, 5 July 2013, p. 3.

The more research-intensive a university, the greater the research cross-subsidy required. This is why Go8 universities such as Sydney, UNSW, Monash and Melbourne all have huge student populations — all over 40,000, and in the case of Monash heading towards 60,000 students. They need this scale to fund their research activities. ANU, unlike the other Go8 universities has always prided itself on this capacity to offer a unique and intimate educational experience — an experience that the current funding model doesn't support.⁹⁷

Additional cuts to the Block Grant and the application of an 'efficiency dividend' reduced the ANU's income even further. The University could only resist the pressure to expand for so long without compromising its research output, which it relied on to sustain its reputation and attract new students. Between 2012 and 2015, the number of undergraduates enrolled each year at the ANU was relatively stable at around 8,700. Between 2015 and 2016, the number of undergraduates jumped by 7.7 per cent to 9,414, then the largest increase in the University's history.⁹⁸

The pressure to save money flowed down to the College level. In July 2013, the Associate Dean, Royston Gustavson, sent a hastily worded email to students in the College of Arts and Social Sciences announcing a move away from traditional tutorials to large interactive workshops and forums. Due to 'funding constraints', he wrote, courses that continued to use tutorials may increase from 15 to 20 students.⁹⁹ In the febrile atmosphere, some students suspected the University intended to abolish tutorials altogether, something the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Marnie Hughes-Warrington, later denied. At a small forum with concerned students, Young admitted that he had only learned of the changes the day after Gustavson's email. He undertook to launch a formal review into the College's decision and the consultation process.¹⁰⁰ The internal review, led by Hughes-Warrington, found no

⁹⁷ *ANU Reporter*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2014.

⁹⁸ *ANU Annual Report*, 2016, p. 51.

⁹⁹ Emma Macdonald, 'ANU strike averted as budget cut fears peak', *Canberra Times*, 28 September 2013, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Emma Macdonald, 'Surprise over tutorial cuts', *Canberra Times*, 13 August 2013, p. 1.

evidence that the College had intended to abolish tutorials altogether or compel staff to adopt forum-style teaching. The issue had been 'lost in translation', she said. 'Unfortunately, the issue came to the fore while the University was also dealing with a difficult budget challenge as a result of funding cuts by the former federal government. These issues appear to have become conflated.'¹⁰¹ Hughes-Warrington made several recommendations to improve internal communications within the College. She also said that approval on 'educational grounds' had been given for 12 courses to move to the forum model (on top of nine already adopted) and did not rule out further 'education innovation'.¹⁰²

Great reform takes time

Bullshit. Come off it. Our education's not for profit!

Protestors outside the ANU Chancelry Building, May 2014.

In November 2013, Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne commissioned former education minister David Kemp, along with Grattan Institute program director Andrew Norton, to review the demand-driven funding system. In the lead up to the 2014 federal budget, Pyne announced plans to allow universities to set their own course fees from 2016 and charge market interest on student debts incurred through the HECS/HELP program. If implemented, the reforms would be the most dramatic changes to Australian higher education since the Dawkins revolution of the 1980s.

A long-time supporter of deregulation, Young greeted the prospect of change with national. So too did Chancellor Evans.¹⁰³ 'It is time to change our one-size-fits-all funding system and let diversity develop', they wrote in a jointly authored piece for *The Australian*. Removing arbitrary limits and letting market forces decide how much students pay for their degrees would allow Australian universities to offer a higher

¹⁰¹ Emma Macdonald, 'ANU strike averted as budget cut fears peak', *Canberra Times*, 28 September 2013.

¹⁰² Emma Macdonald, 'ANU strike averted as budget cut fears peak', *Canberra Times*, 28 September 2013.

¹⁰³ Ian Young, 'The big changes are yet to be seen 2007', *Australian Universities Review*, vol. 49, no. 1 & 2, 2007, pp. 24-5; Evans, *Incorrigible Optimist*, pp. 314-16.

quality of education and compete with prestigious institutions such as Oxford and Harvard, they argued. 'As a nation we have found it difficult to debate this issue, but a measured non-partisan public discussion is long overdue.'¹⁰⁴

The leaders of Australia's largest universities backed deregulation, but many smaller universities feared creating an American-style ivy league that would leave them behind. Greg Craven, Vice-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, memorably captured the mood when he said that chasing 'world-class' ranks for a select few could only come at the expense of the many: 'You don't want to have one Rolls Royce and 12 clapped out Commodores.'¹⁰⁵ Other commentators criticised various aspects of the reforms. ANU economist and architect of HECS, Bruce Chapman, warned of profiteering and price gouging in the unregulated environment.¹⁰⁶ Ross Gittins from the *Sydney Morning Herald* also predicted that prices would rise. He also pointed out that at the same as allowing universities to charge more, the government planned to cut funding to the sector by 20 per cent and then reduce the annual indexation of its contribution:

So the government's primary motivation is clearly to shift more of the cost of universities from itself and onto students. The 20 per cent cut will give universities an immediate and pressing reason to use their new freedom to increase the fees they charge, and the less-generous indexation will maintain the pressure for further increases.¹⁰⁷

Other, more complex issues were lost in the increasingly polarised debate. In making his case, Pyne spoke of creating 'teaching-only colleges' and hiving research into specialist centres of excellence.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, he appeared to foreshadow a return to the binary system of the pre-Dawkins era. What did this mean for the ANU,

¹⁰⁴ Ian Young and Gareth Evans, 'University sector bound by constraints that kill innovation', *The Australian*, 23 April 2014, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Knott, 'Call to ditch fee caps to improve standards: Universities - Push to become 'world class'', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 2014, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ Julie Hare, 'Chapman joins chorus warning of fee inflation', *The Australian*, 3 September 2014, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ Ross Gittins, 'Ignore the PM, university fees will rise steeply', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 2014, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Geoff Maslen, 'Universities steel for anticipated overhaul', *The Age*, 12 May 2014, p. 14. See also, Nick Carter, 'Demand-driven model devalues degrees', *The Australian*, 7 January 2014, p. 10.

which had endured years of acrimony bringing its research and teaching together? Could it mean a return to the bifurcated structure of the past and a resurrection of the IAS?

A week after the federal budget, the National Union of Students launched a nationwide day of action against Pyne's proposals. Students across the country — along with plenty of academics — had little faith in the Minister's promise of 'true price competition' and 'equity scholarships' for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. After all, the HECS levy had been rising since the 1990s. Most students were dismayed at the government's suggestion that domestic students would pay no more for their degrees than their international classmates. At the ANU, where international students already spent over \$30,000 per year in tuition fees, the claim that a university degree might cost \$100,000 could not be dismissed as scaremongering.



Students outside the ANU Chancelry protesting government plans to deregulate higher education fees, 2014. Image: ANU Photography.

On 21 May 2014, about a thousand students and staff gathered in the ANU Union Court for a noisy but peaceful protest before marching to the Vice-Chancellor's office in the Chancelry building. By the time the group had arrived, the number of protestors had dwindled to around a hundred. Some blocked the exits. A smaller number pounded on the glass doors demanding that Young come out and

resign.¹⁰⁹ Another student staged a symbolic 'read-in' by sitting next to a sculpture of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning and wisdom, near the building's entrance. The protestors had vented most of their fury by late afternoon, and Young left freely.

Pyne formally introduced the Higher Education and Research Reform Bill into Parliament in August 2014. In December, ALP and Green's senators joined the crossbench of Nick Xenophon, Glenn Lazarus, Ricky Muir, Jacqui Lambie and Dio Wang to vote against the controversial legislation. Unbowed, the Minister changed his tactics. Early in the New Year, Pyne announced that government funding for the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) was now contingent on the passage of the Bill. The scientific community was outraged. This time, Young stayed out of the quarrel. Still, as the funding threatened several projects supported by his University, another ANU figure stepped forward.

Astronomer and Nobel Laureate Brian Schmidt spoke forcefully against the proposed cuts to the NCIRS, warning that the financial uncertainty had already started to undermine decades of groundbreaking research. Yet, he expressed broad sympathy for the Government's attempt to reform how universities were funded. As he told Fran Kelly on ABC Radio National:

I think this is an incredibly important reform. The current university funding model is, in my opinion, not very good. I would say it is close to being broken. It is certainly not serving either the students or the universities very well. We need to fix it and so I have some sympathy with Minister Pyne trying to do something. I still think there is a lot of discussion to be had about what those reforms are ... I think it would be really good if we could get all sides of government to agree on the framework and then they can argue about the details, about what the subsidies for students are and [what] the payback terms are. But we need to get a framework in place that allows universities, for example my own ANU, to go through and really provide a high-end science education. Right now, we get the same amount of money as the poorest science program in the country and that's just not serving the system well.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Primrose Riordan, Heath Gilmore and Matthew Knott, 'Protesters hole up vice-chancellor in day of anger', *Canberra Times*, 22 May 2014, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Brian Schmidt: Interview with Fran Kelly, ABC Radio, 17 March 2015.

Within hours, Schmidt was being quoted in the Senate chamber as a supporter of the Bill.¹¹¹ Labor senators reminded the Government that Schmidt had also said that tying the future of the NCRIS to the passage of the legislation was 'very childish and it is having a profound impact on something that is going to increase the productivity of the nation.'¹¹² A week later, Pyne withdrew his threat to stop the funding of the NCRIS and split the 20 per cent cut to university funding from the deregulation legislation. It was not enough to appease the crossbenchers, who had been infuriated by the Minister's tactics. In March, they voted against the amended Bill for a second time.¹¹³ Undaunted by the defeat, Pyne issued a statement vowing to try again: 'We will not give up. This reform is too important ... Great reform takes time.'¹¹⁴

Disputes over budget cuts, the restructuring of the School of Music, and the government's attempt to deregulate higher education fees, dominated the early years of Young's vice-chancellorship. To some extent, the acrimony was to be expected. Yet, even at its most intense, the trajectory of Young's program of financial reform and cost-cutting was largely unaffected. But trouble often comes from unexpected places. Midway through his time as vice-chancellor, Young was blindsided by a new source of discontent: climate change and pressure from student activists to reorient the University's billion-dollar asset portfolio. This time, Young found himself engaged on two fronts. On one side, he encountered a fierce public attack from the mining industry. On the other, he faced a student-led movement that developed into one of the most enduring and successful environmental campaigns in the University's history.

¹¹¹ *Senate Official Hansard*, No. 3, 2015 Tuesday, 17 March 2015, 1597-1619.

¹¹² Brian Schmidt: interview with Alison Carbine, ABC Radio, 5 March 2015; see also, Matthew Knott, 'Scientists Shocked to Hear Funds Linked to Senate Vote', *Canberra Times*, 7 March 2015, p. 4.

¹¹³ Laura Tingle, 'Pyne's Threat to Senate on Science Funding Backfires', *The Australian Financial Review*, 16 March 2015, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ Matthew Knott, 'Pyne Plans to Fine Unis for Debt', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 March 2015, p. 5. Pyne continued to draw upon Schmidt's reputation in making his case for the deregulation of the tertiary sector. See, Christopher Pyne, *A letter to my children*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2015, pp. 227-8.

Making trouble

The ANU has never quite had the same reputation for student activism as the larger universities that formed in the Australian suburbs during the 1960s and 1970s. This may be due to the University's closeness to the federal government, or a consequence of its relatively small population of undergraduates. In truth, ANU students can draw on a long history of political agitation. What they have lacked in numbers has been more than made up for in enthusiasm and impact. Environmental issues, from the global to the local, have been on the minds of politically aware students at the ANU since the 1970s. But it has been the threat of climate change has been the major issue that has motivated campus activists since the early 2000s. The campaign to force the ANU to divest from the fossil fuel sector saw a confluence of factors bear down on university decision-makers.

Most importantly, a new generation of student protesters drove change by combining the noise-making and attention-grabbing traditions of the past, such as demonstrations and petitions, with a skilful use of the power and reach of social media. Yet, the story of how the ANU came to begin to divest from the fossil fuel industry is not just about the increasing sophistication and impact of student activism. It is a story about the new responsibilities facing all universities as they managed their public duties, not only as providers of education and research but as ethical and publicly accountable corporate citizens.

* * * *

In early October 2014, in a hastily written press release, the ANU announced that it intended to sell about \$16 million worth of shares in seven mining companies. Barely 150-words long, it said that the University Council had based its decision on an independent review of the University's financial holdings under its Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) Policy. Within days, the ANU was under attack from journalists, politicians and industry representatives.

The *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) led the charge, publishing over 50 articles critical of the ANU's decision, 12 of which appeared on the front page.

Representatives from the so-called 'blacklisted' companies made angry phone calls to members of the University Executive. Sandfire Resources, one of the companies whose stocks the ANU had divested, threatened legal action. Cabinet ministers soon weighed in. Treasurer Joe Hockey worked a well-worn cliché when he suggested that the ANU was 'removed from reality' about what drove the economy and created employment. 'Sometimes the view looks different from the lofty rooms of a university', he said.¹¹⁵ Prime Minister Tony Abbott was more succinct, describing the decision as 'stupid'.¹¹⁶

The shares were a fraction of the ANU's investment portfolio. Yet the outcry, according to the *Canberra Times*, 'verged on the hysterical'.¹¹⁷ On the backfoot, Ian Young took to his blog to explain his decision. 'I have repeatedly said climate change is the most serious issue ever to have faced humanity', he wrote. 'We need to move from a carbon economy and my belief is that this will only happen when we have alternative sources of energy which are competitive with fossil fuels'.¹¹⁸ The Centre for Australian Ethical Research (CAER) provided the Council with environmental, social and governance ratings on every stock in the ANU's portfolio. The University then divested from companies with the lowest ratings. On the ABC current affairs program *Lateline*, Young elaborated on why the University had divested from specific companies:

A company like Santos, for instance, is essentially an oil and gas producer, and so, it may in fact be a very responsible company in terms of a whole range of things that it does, and I'm sure that it is. But because it is primarily an oil and gas-producing company, then it will perform poorly on the environmental criteria because it is a major source of Co2 emissions, which, as we all know, has a significant impact on climate change.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Oliver Milman, 'Coalition accused of 'bullying' ANU after criticism of fossil fuel divestment', *The Guardian*, 13 October 2014.

¹¹⁶ Lis Cox, 'Tony Abbott attacks ANU's 'stupid decision' to dump fossil fuel investments', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 2014.

¹¹⁷ Editorial, 'ANU investment policy draws fire', *Canberra Times*, 8 October 2014, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ <https://vcdesk.anu.edu.au/2014/10/09/anu-divestment/>

¹¹⁹ 'ANU selling out of resources', *Lateline*, ABC, Sydney, 8 October 2014.
<https://www.abc.net.au/lateline/anu-selling-out-of-resources/5800206>

To the disappointment of environmental campaigners, Young also defended the University's decision not to divest entirely from the carbon sector. As he explained in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

The initial calls were to divest from all fossil fuels. This is difficult in Australia, as many of our companies are diversified. They may produce coal, oil or gas but they also do many other things. And given the world's necessary dependence on such fuels for a long time to come, the ethical issues involved are complex. To address these issues ANU established a socially responsible investment policy My own views are that the world must eventually move away from the use of fossil fuels. This, however, will take decades. In the meantime we will require such fuels.¹²⁰

Young's assertion that the University had taken a 'measured' approach to the issue did little to appease the *AFR* or the fossil fuel industry. Greg Evans from the Minerals Council of Australia accused the ANU of 'recklessness', warning universities to 'be very careful when they get involved in these activist campaigns'.¹²¹ Writers in the *AFR* attacked the credibility of the CAER and its rankings methodology. Some of the 'backlisted' companies alleged that the University had not consulted with them or allowed them a right of reply. One *AFR* reporter accused the ANU of hypocrisy after revealing that it was the biggest carbon emitter of Australia's largest universities per student.¹²²

The Vice-Chancellor's academic background also came under scrutiny. The *AFR* seized on news that Young, an internationally recognised oceanographer, had worked for the resources sector to imply that he was hypocritical to support divestment. 'My declared conflict of interest is no secret', Young wrote in a letter published in the paper. 'During my career I have provided advice to the offshore oil and gas industry on the extreme conditions for the safe design of offshore

¹²⁰ Ian Young, 'The real issue is not about shares but how to live in a post-carbon world', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 October 2014, p. 18.

¹²¹ 'ANU selling out of resources', *Lateline*, ABC, Sydney, 8 October 2014.
<https://www.abc.net.au/lateline/anu-selling-out-of-resources/5800206>

¹²² Tim Dodd, 'ANU is top carbon emitter among unis', *Australian Financial Review*, 10 October 2014, p. 6.

structures.' Young hoped that his research had played a 'small part in preserving our marine environment.' Nevertheless, to avoid any conflict of interest, Young chose not to participate in the development of the socially responsible investment policy.¹²³

The debate made life uncomfortable for Young and other senior staff. But there was an upside: the strident reaction from industry and the media reinforced the ANU's status as an influential national institution whose actions had social and economic gravitas. Young held his nerve, taking heart from the outpouring of support he received via email and on the University's Facebook page.¹²⁴ And the fossil fuel sector was right to fear the consequences of the ANU's decision. By 2016, another three Australian universities had sold off millions of dollars in shares from carbon-intensive companies.¹²⁵

Lost in the controversy was the more complex story of how the ANU had arrived at this position. Three years earlier, Young and the Council had been far less willing to engage openly over questions of how the University managed its billion-dollar share portfolio. In 2011, Tom Swann, a student and member of the ANU Environment Collective, received a tip-off from anti-fracking protestors in Northern NSW that the ANU owned shares in the coal-seam gas company Metgasco. A scan of the company's annual report showed that the University held about \$1 million worth of stocks, making it the 12th largest shareholder.¹²⁶ Members of the Environment Collective launched a grassroots protest by erecting a three-metre-high mock 'gas rig' made of milk crates and wooden pallets in the Union Court and began lobbying the Vice-Chancellor. Young took some convincing, but later that year, he announced that the University would sell its Metgasco holdings. Students welcomed the move and requested that the ANU publicly list the details of its entire investment portfolio. With the divestment movement gaining momentum worldwide, the Environment Collective decided to look beyond Metgasco and began advocating for total

¹²³ Ian Young, 'Young: my oil conflict is public and reconcilable', *Australian Financial Review*, 17 October 2014, p. 43.

¹²⁴ Ian Young, 'ANU leading ethical drive to a post-carbon world', *Canberra Times*, 13 October 2014, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Luke Kemp, 'The fossil fuel divestment game is getting bigger, thanks to the smaller players', *The Conversation*, 12 September 2016.

¹²⁶ *Woroni*, 12 October 2011.

divestment from the fossil fuel industry. A new group, Fossil Free ANU, formed out of the Environment Collective with a more specific plan to stop the University from investing in carbon-intensive enterprises.

Swann continued his investigations and lodged an FOI request for official documents about the ANU's involvement with 'any company that generates revenue from oil, coal, gas, or uranium.' The University rejected Swann's application. He recalled: 'They said there was no public interest in disclosure, which was pretty outrageous because we were the public and we were very, very interested.' Undeterred, Tom successfully appealed on the grounds that the ANU had misinterpreted the Act. Once released, the documents revealed that since 2011 the University had only sold half its holdings in Metgasco. The information also showed that the University had been buying shares in Santos, another coal-seam mining company, at the same time as selling its shares in Metgasco. According to Swann, this 'was not just secrecy but hypocrisy.'¹²⁷

The Fossil Free ANU campaign gathered momentum. In 2013, the Council began developing an ethical framework to guide its investment decisions in response to continued pressure from the group. Modelled on a similar policy used by Stanford University in the United States, the SRI policy aimed to 'avoid investments likely to cause substantial injury'. These included shares in companies that derived their income from coal, tobacco, gambling or pornography.

The 2014 decision marked the high point of Fossil Free ANU's campaign. In an article for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Louis Klee, spokesperson for the group, celebrated the decision as a victory for grassroots activism:

[E]ven when Prime Minister Abbott refuses to put climate change on the agenda, the actions of the students of ANU have put it in the public eye once again. And the success of this grassroots movement in creating this crucial moment in Australia demonstrates that the citizens of this country are powerful voices in the debate over climate justice. It demonstrates

¹²⁷ 'How to make trouble: three climate activists in conversation: Judy Kuo and Tom Swann in interview with Odette Shenfield', *Demos Journal*, February 14, 2018.

that they are, ultimately, voices speaking with growing eloquence, urgency and authority for one thing: action to address global climate change.¹²⁸

Since the divestment brouhaha, the ANU has distanced itself from the direct oversight of its investments. In October 2015, Council approved the appointment of an external portfolio manager for its domestic equities portfolio. While the University makes no decisions about individual stock selection, the manager must ensure that each investment meets SRI policy guidelines. The ANU retains shares in carbon-producing industries (including some of the companies sold in 2014 divestment), although it has progressively reduced the Co2 intensity of its portfolio.¹²⁹

Young later embraced his role in shifting the ANU's investments away from carbon-intensive industries. 'We were not frightened to tackle difficult issues', he wrote in 2016. 'We seem to have played a major role in a movement which now seems unstoppable.' His self-congratulatory remarks obscure his initial misgivings and the University's attempts to frustrate the student-led campaign. His claim that '[o]n divestment, it is clear we ... played a truly national and international leadership role' is similarly disingenuous.¹³⁰ That accolade belongs to the students and their supporters, whose initiative over several years forced a reluctant University to act. Fossil Free ANU is one of Australia's longest-running and most successful divestment movements. The group continues to campaign for the total divestment from companies involved with the exploration, extraction, production or financing of fossil fuels.

¹²⁸ Louis Klee, 'Students put the Coalition on notice over climate change', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October 2014.

¹²⁹ Ben Potter, 'ANU reinvests in 'harmful' resources: social responsibility', *Australian Financial Review*, 12 May 2017, p. 3; *ANU Socially Responsible Investment Policy 2016 Report*, 1 May 2017. <https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/anu-socially-responsible-investment-policy-2016-report>

¹³⁰ Ian Young, 'Farewell ANU', 17 December, 2015. <https://vcdesk.anu.edu.au/2015/12/17/farewell-anu/>

The School of Music Revisited

In February 2015, Young announced that he would leave the University by the end of the year. The 58-year-old did not intend to ease into a gentle retirement. As a holder of two ARC discovery grants, Young planned to return to his study of maritime engineering and oceanography at Swinburne University.¹³¹ But a vice-chancellorship that had been defined by a series of unexpected crises would not end in a desired calm. For all his efforts to focus on other issues, the School of Music, once more, flared into the headlines, demanding his full attention.

It had been three years since the restructure and the School was now on the brink of collapse. Since 2012, the total number of undergraduate students had fallen from 228 to 77, with annual new enrolments dropping from 68 to 11 over the same period. Postgraduate research had suffered a similar decline. The lack of instrument teachers had been especially damaging, and the PDA was widely acknowledged to have failed. Market research initiated by the University students wanted opportunities to improve musical performance skills, regardless of their intended career path. If a given school did not have skilled teaching musicians on staff, students looked elsewhere. The absence of performance tuition had also reduced the School's capacity to organise ensemble activities or perform for the ANU and the wider community, further reducing the School's visibility.¹³²

With little money and a drastically reduced team, Peter Tregear had found the University management hostile to his attempts to rebuild confidence in the School. In August 2015, citing increasing tension with senior management, he announced his intention to leave. Although publicly denied by the University at the time, the Commonwealth authority responsible for managing worker's compensation claims, Comcare, had started an investigation into a series of complaints relating to untenable workloads and a toxic work culture.¹³³ Tregear's departure marked a new low, triggering further resignations. In October, Anne Ewing

¹³¹ Emma Macdonald, 'Global search to begin for new ANU chief departure to spark global search', *Canberra Times*, 5 February 2015, p. 1.

¹³² Andrew Podger, *ANU School of Music Consultations: Final Report*, 2016, p. 23; Emma Macdonald, 'School of Music numbers collapse: ANU cuts hit enrolments', *Canberra Times*, 4 February 2013, p. 1.

¹³³ Emma Macdonald, 'Emails reveal School of Music turmoil', *Canberra Times*, 9 September 2015, p.2.

quit after 11 years of teaching, first joining the School to study violin performance as an undergraduate in 1997 and then completing postgraduate qualifications. Ewing felt an obligation to speak out. She used Facebook to record her hopes for a new vice-chancellor who could finally arrest 'the forced downward-spiralling of the school's function and reputation'.¹³⁴

Privately, the University considered disbanding the School altogether. 'The budgetary situation is dire, even if performance [teaching] is phased out', Chancellor Evans told Young in a letter in which he expressed concern for Tregear's health and the future of the School. Young suggested that the University might use Tregear's departure as a 'trigger to consider whether we continue with a School of Music'. Young went on to say that while he accepted the need to avoid bad publicity, with the Council's permission, he would 'clear the deck' for the new vice-chancellor due to start in 2016. This time, Evans urged restraint. University Council had been clear, he wrote: 'that however much we might wish we have never bequeathed them [the schools of Music and Art], both music and art needed to be present in some form at ANU.' The exchange between Evans and Young, which only became public in 2019 during a tribunal hearing into Tregear's claim for 'workplace injury compensation', confirmed the University's ambivalence towards the School, something its staff had long known.¹³⁵

Too Nice

Against a background of job losses, funding cuts, increasing casualisation, heavier workloads, and rising student-staff ratios, the ANU under Ian Young continued to forge ahead. The campus buzzed with new students. A major program to replace the University's ageing buildings was underway. Money from competitive grants continued to pour in, and research outputs reached an all-time high. The ANU re-entered the top 20 international universities. The dispersed nature of the campus and its fragmented administrative architecture helped contain the industrial rancour

¹³⁴ Emma Macdonald, 'School of Music teacher quits citing toxic culture', *Canberra Times*, 27 October 2015, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Sherryn Groch, 'School of Music's end was pondered', *Canberra Times*, 5 March 2019, p. 1.

that beset some corners of the University. But mostly, productivity was sustained by the dedication and resilience of staff and their students. Yet, for Young, it was still not enough. In an exit interview published in the *ANU Reporter*, he dismissed those who complained about the pace of change:

I still don't believe we have as strong a performance culture as we need. The University has an obligation to our staff to help them to reach their full potential. We have come a long way but there is still more to be achieved.¹³⁶

'The ANU is an institution with remarkable quality', Young wrote a few months later in his farewell blog post. 'It is also an institution which unfortunately tolerates under-performance. In a sense, we are too nice, too collegiate, and don't adequately address these issues.'¹³⁷

The new buildings that had begun to sprout across the campus during Young's tenure deflected attention from a more troubling recent past, perhaps the most fractious in the University's history. Changing government policy settings and the financial pressure they caused were not of Young's making, but his uncompromising style and neo-liberal vision elicited animosity and mistrust. Yet, he was not without his supporters, who appreciated his tenacity and strength of purpose. They sympathised with his determination to remove unproductive staff and foster a more ambitious, performance-driven culture. But the readjustment had been costly, in people and morale. While Young's predecessor had removed many of the structural barriers that kept the campus apart, the ANU remained as divided as it ever had been, albeit in different ways. Across the University, solidarity was getting harder to find.

¹³⁶ *ANU Reporter*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2015, pp. 12-13.

¹³⁷ Ian Young, 'Farewell ANU', 17 December 2015. <http://vcdesk.anu.edu.au/2015/12/17/farewell-anu/>

A New Hope

The beguiling promise of every new vice-chancellor is that they will deliver new sources of finance, cement constructive relations with government, uphold academic values, inspire great works, and heal long-running rifts and feuds. (Such lists are assembled in different proportions and different priorities according to the interests served). The dream rarely lasts long. But in 2016, after nearly two decades of budget cuts, increasing workloads, and, at times, acrimonious restructures, the ANU community could be forgiven for expecting too much from their next leader.

At first glance, Brian Schmidt was an unlikely choice. Enthusiastic and avuncular, the American-born astrophysicist was an egghead, a boffin in a blue suit with no university-wide management experience. In many ways, Schmidt was a throwback to the kind of leader not seen since at the head of an Australian university since the 1980s, perhaps earlier. Chancellor Evans recalled being told in private that the decision was 'courageous'; in public, Evans praised Schmidt's 'emotional intelligence' as well as the other more certified attributes.¹³⁸ Could this brilliant scientist, who had spent his career thinking about the nature of the cosmos, be expected to not only lead a large, complex organisation but restore stability, trust and confidence in its future?



¹³⁸ Evans, *Incorrigible Optimist*, p. 307.

**Professor Brian Schmidt became Vice-Chancellor of the ANU in 2016. Image: ANU
Photography**

The early signs were promising. Schmidt's personal style – earnest, thoughtful and humane — made a favourable impression on staff and students alike. He personified the University's values as well as articulating them. On staff since 1995, Schmidt was a veritable product of the ANU. He had also witnessed years of, at times, painful organisational reform. He also saw how seemingly small matters could escalate into full-blown crises that overwhelmed his predecessor's leadership. Determined not to make the same mistake, Schmidt ordered a review of the School of Music in one of the first decisions of his vice-chancellorship. Suffering a severe case of 'review fatigue', the University community greeted the move with a shrug. Though predictable, it was a vital step if he was to have any chance of saving the beleaguered School. It established a fresh foundation for his leadership and redefined some aspects of the ANU's relations with its community.

In August 2016, former head of the Australian Public Service Commission, Andrew Podger, submitted his final report on the School of Music. Based on extensive consultation with staff and members of the wider music community, the report outlined a bold plan for the future and a frank assessment of the past. 'It is clear to me that the status quo is unacceptable', he wrote. To 'resolve the malaise surrounding the School', Podger urged the Vice-Chancellor to publicly acknowledge that 'the University had not managed the challenges facing the School well over a very long period.' He also recommended that the University abandon its formal pursuit of 'specific instances of past mismanagement or misbehaviour'.¹³⁹

By year's end, Schmidt had acknowledged the past failings and committed the University to a \$12.5 million strategic investment in the School and a return to advanced performance teaching. Heartened by the new initiative, the interim Head of School, Malcolm Gillies, welcomed Schmidt's more consolatory approach. 'We recognise that some will still look to the past, with its aspects of distrust and distress, but now is the time to applaud and support this singular, strategic commitment', he

¹³⁹ Podger, *ANU School of Music Consultations: Final Report*, August 2016.

wrote.¹⁴⁰ Rebuilding the School would take years, but Schmidt had passed the first real test of his vice-chancellorship.

Schmidt had no sooner settled one corner of the University when yet another multi-faceted problem hove into view, a problem that had been almost a decade in the making.

The Forbidden City

There was trouble at the Australian Centre for China in the World (CIW) from the moment Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced its establishment in 2010. The gift from the government to the ANU had been substantial; a foundation endowment of \$35 million from the Commonwealth Department of Education (DOE) and a further \$18 million for a new building, an architectural jewel that was to reflect Australia's commitment to deepening its engagement with a global power.¹⁴¹ Intellectually, the plan for the CIW was no less ambitious. 'This initiative is to be far more than just a resource for government and academics', Rudd said at the launch of the Centre. By building on a tradition of China scholarship that started in the 1950s in the Department of Far Eastern History, Rudd believed that the ANU would champion a new era in engagement with the Chinese world, based on a disciplinary approach known as 'new sinology'. Rudd elaborated on the Centre's central theoretical promise:

To develop a New Sinology, we must take scholars, experts and policymakers out of the silos of separate academic disciplines and departments. We need to foster a new degree of collaboration and engagement between scholars and practitioners of different backgrounds and expertise. And to do that, I believe we need to establish a new centre for study, learning and the exchange of ideas and understanding. A place where scholars, thinkers and policy specialists can engage in an across-the-board approach that brings history, culture, literature, philosophy and cultural studies perspectives into active engagement with those working on public policy, the environment, social change, economics, trade, foreign policy, defence policy and strategic analysis. I can think of no better place

¹⁴⁰ *ANU Reporter*, Vol. 47, Number 4. 2016.

¹⁴¹ In 2010, the Commonwealth Department of Education was part of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

than the Australian National University to further the sophisticated research and dialogue on China's engagement with Australia, our region and globally.¹⁴²

Rudd's passion for China was well known. But just how a university managed to garner such a windfall from the government in straitened economic times was unclear. Equally mysterious was why the ANU needed an expensive new centre when it already employed some of the world's leading China scholars and teachers. *The Australian* drew attention to the lack of transparency over the deal and the 'clubbish' relationship between the Prime Minister, the Centre's founding director, ANU professor Geremie Barmé, and Vice-Chancellor Ian Chubb. Other universities with strong research and teaching interests in China also questioned the decision to concentrate funds at the ANU. The Vice-Chancellor batted their concerns away with his usual gusto. 'Yesterday's roosters are yesterday's roosters', he told the press: 'Other people always want transparency except when it applies to them [The ANU] has the talent, location and reputation to claim the new Centre as its own.'¹⁴³

The money for the CIW was part of a \$112.9 million allocation (over four years) intended to build closer relations between the university and the federal government as part of the 'Commonwealth-Australian National University Strategic Relationship'. It also included funds to expand ANU's Crawford School of Economics and Government and \$17.3 million to establish and support a National Security College at the University.¹⁴⁴

Despite a lingering misconception that the CIW was a China-backed super Confucius Institute¹⁴⁵, the public controversy over the Centre's origins proved short-lived. Barmé recruited a talented group of scholars and got to work. Together they began training and supporting the next generation of China specialists, offering a PhD and Post-doctoral fellowship program and conducting other educational

¹⁴² Kevin Rudd, *Australia and China in the World*, 70th Morrison Lecture, ANU, 2010.

¹⁴³ Bernard Lane, 'Rudd's ANU China Centre put noses out of joint', *The Australian*, 11 August 2010, p. 23-4.

¹⁴⁴ Primrose Riordan, 'Rudd China centre under review', *The Australian*, 14 August 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Confucius Institutes, which are hosted by 13 Australian universities in partnership with Chinese universities, have come under scrutiny from the federal government amid concerns they function as a plank of the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda effort.

activities both inside and outside the University.¹⁴⁶ Six years later, Barmé was gone and an independent review found the Centre to be 'faltering', isolated from the rest of the University and in danger of collapse.¹⁴⁷

What happened at the CIW is complex and cuts across a cluster of intersecting issues, including financial administration, intellectual autonomy, professional jealousy, leadership, theoretical positions and, in what has become a perennial problem for the ANU, the capacity to collaborate across a diverse and fragmented campus.

The CIW was born of the combined political and intellectual energies of Rudd, Barmé and Chubb. Within the ANU, Barmé had provided the most sustained and strategic impetus for the Centre, with Chubb serving as his backer and lobbyist. Barmé had been at the ANU since the 1970s and had built an impressive reputation as a brilliant scholar and outspoken public intellectual on all things China. Inspired by major international centres such as the Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies at Harvard and the Centre for Chinese Studies at Oxford, Barmé had been building the case for a separate China-related centre over many years.¹⁴⁸ His motives were not purely intellectual. A stand-alone Centre was also part of a push, as he said, 'aimed at securing the legacy of work on the Sinitic world at the ANU' and 'protecting and enhancing the major China-related library resources in Canberra,' under threat from university cost-cutting.¹⁴⁹ Those threats also included the removal of privileges enjoyed by academics in the IAS, in which Barmé had thrived, that had been wound back under Chubb's reforms. External money would, in theory, offer a modicum of financial independence from the dictates of the Chancery and the College. Importantly, it would allow him to pursue his intellectual interests with similar autonomy. Rudd's election victory in 2007 was to provide a golden opportunity. The two men had history. Barmé had lectured the future prime minister when he was a

¹⁴⁶ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ *China Studies Review: Report of the External Review Panel*, 25 November 2017, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁸ Simon Jenkins, 'A blossoming architectural gem', *ANU Reporter*, Vol. 47, No. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Geremie Barmé, 'New Sinology', *Chinese Studies Association of Australia Newsletter*, No. 31 May 2005.

'shiny-eyed' student in the Faculty of Asian Studies in the mid-1970s.¹⁵⁰ The pair had stayed in touch ever since.

Then, in 2008, Barmé and others at the ANU formed the China Institute as part of a pitch for an Australian Research Council-funded Centre of Excellence. When it failed to make the short-list, Barmé mentioned his plans to Rudd during a broader discussion about cooperation between the ANU and the federal government. Happily, Rudd's desire to leave his mark on the scholarly community dovetailed neatly with Chubb's plan to reinvigorate the University's links to government and Barmé's dream of a scholarly empire.¹⁵¹ Rudd's imprimatur not only side-stepped the Australian Research Council, it all but removed the need for consultation with the extensive China studies community within ANU who would be most affected by a new centre.

China scholars outside the ANU spoke publicly of their concerns about the CIW's embrace of 'new sinology'. John Fitzgerald, past president of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia, claimed that the theory's indifference to traditional disciplines of history and economics rendered it 'incapable of enhancing Australia's reputation for historical studies of China.' Others, such as former president of the Asian Studies Association, Beverly Hooper, expressed surprise that a national leader would not only 'endorse one particular scholarly approach to China but prescribe the use of that approach for an officially funded academic centre.' Barmé countered that the idea of the Centre as an influence on government policy had been well received in Australia and overseas.¹⁵²

In truth, the CIW was far less doctrinaire than its critics claimed. Not all China scholars at the ANU shared a commitment to the new Centre's guiding philosophy. Indeed, not all academics within CIW fully shared this view either but were still prepared to contribute. However, both inside and outside the CIW, staff had reservations over matters of style, including the postmodernist names given to the

¹⁵⁰ Bernard Lane, 'Rudd's ANU China Centre put noses out of joint', *The Australian*, 11 August 2010, pp. 23-4.

¹⁵¹ Bernard Lane, 'Rudd's ANU China Centre put noses out of joint', *The Australian*, 11 August 2010, pp. 23-4.

¹⁵² Bernard Lane, 'Rudd's ANU China Centre put noses out of joint', *The Australian*, 11 August 2010, pp. 23-4.

various research areas and Barmé's forceful personality.¹⁵³ And while some commentators acknowledged the Centre's cloudy origins, they remained optimistic about its future. The real test, said one, was not how it came into existence but how well it collaborated with the community of China scholars left out of the CIW party.¹⁵⁴

Leaving aside its theoretical foundations, the CIW was a curious creation in another, perhaps more significant, way. As a stand-alone institute at arm's length from where the bulk of China-related research and teaching was already going on, the CIW seemed like a throwback to the earlier model of scholarly organisation at the ANU, with its sharp separation of research and teaching. It seemed to be out of step with the thrust of Chubb's decade-long quest to reform the university and remove duplication and factional stoushes over resources. Chubb, however, was a pragmatist. At a time when the recurring federal funding for the University was stagnant, any new money was unlikely to come from a government without there being something spectacular to show for it. Former foreign correspondent Graeme Dobell observed that the project was deeply personal for Rudd: that the Centre was 'a reflection of Rudd's life as much as an expression of Australia's future interests.' In any case, in the flush of excitement that accompanied this new venture, the question of the Centre's financial accountability and its integration with the broader University could be set to one side.¹⁵⁵

The CIW's uncertain relationship to the rest of the University first revealed itself in its dealings with the China Institute, the predecessor to the new Centre. While the China Institute survived the unsuccessful bid for ARC funding and served as a 'comprehensive umbrella' that brought some overarching coherence to the broad range of China-related scholarship across the University, its future was always tied to the CIW.¹⁵⁶ Funding commitments to the Institute were minor and included a

¹⁵³ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Bernard Lane, 'Rudd's ANU China Centre put noses out of joint', *The Australian*, 11 August 2010, p. 23.

¹⁵⁵ Rowan Callick, 'Rudd backs Chinese ANU centre', *The Australian*, 29 December 2009.

¹⁵⁶ The China Institute was one of ten Country or Regional Institutes constituted within the ANU's College of Asia and the Pacific. The Institutes have been important vehicles for creating profile for research and teaching on countries and regions of strategic significance to the university; providing an entry point for external stakeholders seeking regional expertise; attracting and receiving external funding; and facilitating cross-disciplinary work.

Director's salary and an annual budget of \$250,000, used for PhD scholarships, an administration assistant, and conference and travel costs. Yet, even as the CIW began taking on more of the China Institute's activities, the University did not abandon the increasingly redundant body. At least, not initially. Despite its increasing subordination to the Centre, the Institute was maintained, in part, to appease those who felt excluded from the new Centre or disagreed with its theoretical approach.¹⁵⁷ The Institute continued as a neutral body covering CIW, Crawford, Bell and CHL (as well as China academics external to College of Asia and the Pacific). Its activities were modest, restricted to running the China Seminar Series (hosted by CIW). Subsequent cuts to the China Institute budget and a reduction in the Director's salary did little to discourage a growing perception that the CIW was the preferred entity around which China scholarship revolved. A 2017 review of China studies across the University recommended that it made 'sense to fold China Institute's activities and roles into CIW.' All links to the China Institute were subsequently removed from the ANU website. The review noted that the absorption of the Institute 'would be administratively cleaner, and avoid the unnecessary misunderstandings that result from the existence of both bodies and their similar nomenclature.'¹⁵⁸

The establishment of the CIW at the ANU had caused some resentment in other Australian universities with scholars working in similar fields.¹⁵⁹ In response, the Centre redoubled its efforts to collaborate with colleagues from other universities and provided generous funding for external partnerships during the Centre's early years. The outward focus, while laudable, masked a deeper problem: it was simply easier to work with like-minded colleagues outside the ANU than it was to face the increasingly fractious atmosphere within the China studies community on its doorstep.¹⁶⁰ Only later would the ramifications of this decision become apparent. Meanwhile, another even more devilishly complex set of issues now threatened to strike at the developing Centre's foundations.

¹⁵⁷ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, pp. 5, 30, 43.

¹⁵⁸ *China Studies Review: Report of the External Review Panel*, 25 November 2017, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Bernard Lane, 'Rudd's ANU China Centre put noses out of joint', *The Australian*, 11 August 2010, pp. 23-4.

¹⁶⁰ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, pp. 30, 43.

Thirty-five million dollars must have seemed like a vast sum of money for a newly formed academic centre. And, in many ways, it was. But managing this extraordinary windfall soon proved to be more difficult than anyone first thought. Far from giving the Centre a degree of financial autonomy, the reliance on the endowment deepened its ties to University administration, although in ways not anticipated at the start. Soon after its formation, the CIW found itself caught between trying to meet the conditions of its special agreement with the DOE and the university's financial decision-makers who managed the endowment.

During its early negotiations with the DoE, the ANU (presumably with Chubb's blessing) had agreed to match the DOE's foundation grant, thus ensuring the Centre's viability beyond its first seven years. Then, in 2012, the new vice-chancellor, Ian Young, withdrew the University's commitment as he attempted to deal with a steep decline in revenue. The scope of the agreement with the DoE had been contingent on this funding and, therefore, needed to be substantially redrawn.

While discussions were underway, the Centre suspended its expenditure against the endowment. Instead, it began accruing its operating costs against an account with the College of Asia and Pacific (CAP). Then, in late 2014, under a variation to the original agreement (reached after nearly two years of negotiations), the endowment was moved into the ANU's Long Term Investment Pool to increase potential income. This seemingly innocuous decision would come to have profound ramifications for the Centre.

The CIW now relied on investment returns to fund its activities. But to preserve the endowment's income-generating capacity, the capital was not to fall below \$26 million. The ANU agreed to provide a minimum annual contribution to the Centre of \$200,000 up to 2020 (approximately \$1 million in total), a far cry from its original promise of \$35 million. Investment returns were distributed to the endowment at a rate determined by the ANU Investment Office. Crucially, these rates were not a direct indication of actual market returns but rather on the much lower rate that ensured that the endowment capital was preserved in perpetuity. An added complication was that between 2014 and 2016, the Investment Office downgraded its investment income forecasts, further reducing the money returned to the CIW. In 2016, for example, the shortfall in expected income exceeded \$1

million, around 25 per cent of the Centre's annual budget. In turn, the low returns affected how quickly the Centre drew down on the endowment's remaining capital and risk breaching the earning floor of \$26 million.

An internal assessment of the Centre later noted, with some understatement, that: 'coordinating the strategic decisions made by CIW (with regard to satisfying the DOE agreement) with the financial decisions taken by Investment Office has proven difficult.'¹⁶¹ By early 2015, CIW had reached a peak of students, staff, and activity levels. However, it was now clear that the current spending rates were unsustainable. To cut costs, the Centre did not replace departing staff members. It reduced the number of post-doctoral fellowships, internal research grants and travel bursaries.

Another financial issue loomed over the Centre and the CAP. During its early years, it had accumulated a debt of over \$8 million to the College following the suspension of the endowment and the renegotiation of the agreement with the DOE. The debt was carried over from year to year but never paid. In 2017, the CIW made it clear that: 'a clear plan to settle this issue is imperative. This will require coordination and cooperation throughout a complex university hierarchy, complicated by staff turnover and a fading "institutional memory" of how this financial situation came into being.'¹⁶²

The CIW's financial woes hampered its attempts to reduce its reliance on the endowment. The reduction in staff limited the capacity of the Centre to attract research grants, engage with potential philanthropists and undertake executive training. Attempts to boost income through teaching had also struck trouble. The Centre clashed with some academic units over the duplication of existing courses and competition for enrolments (and the funding that came with them) among an already small cohort of potential students.¹⁶³

Securing money from non-government sources in a way that did not compromise the Centre's academic integrity was yet another challenge. In 2016, a Chinese-Australian billionaire property developer offered to donate \$5 million, a

¹⁶¹ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, p. 7.

¹⁶² *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, p. 8.

¹⁶³ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, pp. 14, 43.

boost that would have made a considerable difference to the Centre's financial outlook. The Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) intervened and advised Vice-Chancellor Schmidt to reject the offer because of the developer's links to the Chinese Communist Party. The University will not reveal the name of the individual. But a joint ABC *Four Corners-Fairfax* investigation in 2017 claimed that ASIO had identified Dr Chau Chak Wing and Huang Xiangmo as two benefactors active in Australia at the time. Both men had made significant donations to Australian political parties and academic institutions, including the University of Technology in Sydney.¹⁶⁴ In 2021, Dr Chau successfully sued the ABC for defamation over his portrayal as a Communist Party member in the program.¹⁶⁵ Whether or not these figures had any link to the ANU offer, these general issues were clearly of great sensitivity.

Some of the problems facing the CIW were well known to those on the outside. But the financial challenges associated with operating the endowment were not. The opening of the Centre's purpose-built and award-winning building in 2014, complete with manicured gardens and commissioned artworks, did nothing to dispel the impression that the CIW enjoyed a surfeit of riches unavailable to staff elsewhere in the University. That the building was paid for under an entirely separate budget for capital works, which bore no relationship to the endowment and the problems of its ongoing management, was poorly understood.

Many China academics located elsewhere in University were unmoved by the fanfare that accompanied the opening of a new building which had little bearing on their working conditions. Those who never felt included in the CIW's mission mockingly referred to the new building as The Forbidden City, a reference to one of Barme's publications as well as his imperious style of leadership. Later in 2014, the already chilly relations between the CIW and the rest of the University became even cooler when an external review recommended sweeping changes to the School of Culture, History and Languages (CHL) in the Research School of Asia and the Pacific,

¹⁶⁴ Chris Uhlmann, 'ASIO warned ANU of donor links to Chinese Communist party, Opposition ramps up inquiry call', [ABC News Online](#), 14 June 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Max Mason, 'Chau Chak Wing awarded \$590,000 in defamation case', *Australian Financial Review*, 2 February 2021.

the academic unit which taught over 70 per cent of the University's courses with China content.¹⁶⁶ The CHL's budget deficit of around \$1.5 million seemed trifling against the money controlled by the CIW, or its still unpaid debt of some \$8 million with CAP. Yet, according to the University's financial protocols, the CHL was a separate unit and therefore had to manage independently. Despite their fierce resistance, CHL lost significant numbers of senior staff (including experienced China academics) and many language courses were transferred online to be run by casual or part-time staff.¹⁶⁷

In 2015, amidst continuing difficulties at the Centre and CHL, Barmé left the ANU. He moved to New Zealand a year later and founded the Wairarapa Academy for New Sinology with John Minford.¹⁶⁸ While Barmé's time as Director had been stormy, his forceful leadership had helped bind the Centre together during its formative years. At the same time, it repelled those on the outside who held different theoretical positions who wanted to engage more fully with the Centre. Barmé's departure, combined with a grand building with too few staff to fill it, became an unfortunate symbol of the Centre's faltering mission and its isolation from the broader campus.

One might have expected the problems at the CIW and CHL to have fostered some solidarity among the broader Asian studies community. Yet, even as debate raged over the proposed restructure of CHL, relations across the campus continued to sour. In November 2017, when the CIW faced a damning external review of its operations, the animosity had become so entrenched, the subsequent report noted, that 'those who never felt included in the CIW experienced ... a kind of schadenfreude, even as they acknowledged the harmful impact of the CIW's unrealised potential upon Chinese studies at ANU broadly.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, pp. 49-54.

¹⁶⁷ Emma MacDonald, 'Staff and budget cuts at esteemed ANU College of Asia and the Pacific', *Canberra Times*, 3 November 2015; William Sima, 'ANU celebrates excellence in Asia-Pacific studies by axing it', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 March 2016.

¹⁶⁸ *Dominion Post* (NZ), 7 October 2016.

¹⁶⁹ *China Studies Review: Report of the External Review Panel*, 25 November 2017, 6; Primrose Riordan, 'ANU's China centre 'in disarray'', *The Australian*, 23 February 2018.

The review — written by a senior DFAT official and professors from Harvard, Oxford and the National University of Singapore — offered a bruising assessment.¹⁷⁰ It dismissed the CIW's claim that it had collaborated 'prolifically' with China academics within the ANU and admonished its 'failure to adequately engage teaching and research staff in China studies from different parts of the ANU in the mission of the CIW'. The result: 'disaffection and estrangement from all sides.'¹⁷¹ The Centre was also criticised for a 'flawed funding and budget model, resulting in chronic deficit spending'. The review recommended that the Centre be stripped of its stand-alone status and reformed as a 'hub around which research and teaching in China studies taking place across the university revolves'.¹⁷²

With some justification, staff at the CIW could boast of their considerable output of scholarly publications, conference papers and lectures, and a cohort of talented PhD students and post-doctoral fellows nurtured by the Centre. Nevertheless, in 2017 staff from the Centre admitted in an internal 'self-study' that:

more could have been done ... to bring others on board in the early stages of CIW's creation There also seems to have been insufficient attention in explaining CIW, its role, scope and funding, to the wider ANU community.¹⁷³

In attempting to unravel the reasons for the CIW decline, it is tempting to lay much of the blame on the Centre's leadership. Barmé's five years at the helm had been polarising. His leadership style drew praise and censure in equal measure, sometimes from the same individuals. Looking back, Schmidt admired Barmé as 'a brilliant intellectual' and one of the great China scholars in the world. Yet he

¹⁷⁰ The panel included Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade official, Graham Fletcher, Harvard University professor Mark Elliot, Oxford University professor Rana Mitter, UNSW professor Louise Edwards, Griffith University professor Sue Trevaskes and National University of Singapore professor Wang Gungwu, who had worked at the Department of Far Eastern History at the ANU between 1968 and 1988.

¹⁷¹ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, p. 15; *China Studies Review: Report of the External Review Panel*, 25 November 2017, p. 2; Primrose Riordan, 'ANU's China centre 'in disarray'', *The Australian*, 23 February 2018.

¹⁷² *China Studies Review: Report of the External Review Panel*, 25 November 2017, p. 3.

¹⁷³ *China Studies Review: Internal Self-Study*, 2017, p. 5.

concedes that Barmé was 'perhaps not the world's best administrator of a multi-million-dollar centre.'¹⁷⁴

Yet, blaming the CIW's decline on its former Director obscures the parade of operational, financial and intellectual issues that affected the CIW. Of course, managerial and leadership failures cannot be ignored, but the root causes of the Centre's struggles were present from the very beginning.¹⁷⁵ Deaf to the echoes of the past, the CIW resurrected the structural divisions and theoretical battle lines that had characterised the "old" ANU and its rigid separation of research and undergraduate teaching: the 'advanced fuckers' and the 'general fuckers', as the historian Manning Clark so vividly expressed it in the late 1960s.¹⁷⁶ In half a century, very few academic units at the ANU had been able to transcend the chasm. By the early 2000s, the experiment of a split campus was broadly thought to have failed. So it was a surprising act of confidence that anyone in the 2010s thought they could succeed where their predecessors had not.

Following the 2017 external review, the University faced a difficult decision about the future of the CIW and China studies at the ANU. As with the School of Music, Schmidt and the University Council considered whether to disband the Centre entirely or embark on a complete overhaul. For the second year in a row, Schmidt elected to rescue another academic unit that had drifted from its broader community. He accepted the panel's recommendations to recast the Centre as a 'hub' for all China-related teaching and research. Schmidt also allocated a special tranche of funds to cover the Centre's debts and funded the recruitment of new China specialists across the University. No longer a stand-alone academic unit, the reformed CIW has no permanent academic staff except for its Director. Similar to the operation of other ANU academic centres and institutes, staff from anywhere in the University working on China-related subjects can apply for affiliation with the Centre. Membership allows them to apply for project funding (paid for from income

¹⁷⁴ Brian Schmidt, interview with author, July 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Primrose Riordan, 'ANU's China centre 'in disarray'', *The Australian*, 23 February 2018.

¹⁷⁶ Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The life of Manning Clark*, Melbourne, Miegunyah Press, 2011, pp. 502-3. For another variation of Clark's characterisation see, Foster, *The Making of the Australian National University*, p. 179.

generated from the endowment) through a competitive bidding process.¹⁷⁷ Its damning assessment notwithstanding, the external review remained upbeat about the prospects of a Centre once it began operating on more transparent and inclusive lines:

ANU's future success in regaining its reputation as a world-class centre of China studies will depend, in part, on the willingness of its current and future faculty to collaborate in a collegiate manner. To build a sense of community amongst China Studies scholars at the ANU, a reimagined CIW could provide office space and share resources with non-CIW China studies academics. This would go some way to building a sense of community both within and across different schools.¹⁷⁸

The short history of the CIW still raises eyebrows among current and former China scholars, and the details of its decline and re-emergence will continue to be debated. But the lessons for the ANU are salutary, if obvious. The way academic units are established matters. Rigorous oversight of their finances matters. The trajectory of strategic decisions, once in train, is not easily arrested, overcome or forgotten. Mismanagement and distrust leave a lasting and toxic legacy that risks overshadowing all the good work being done. The tumult of the last decade will take time to settle. Until then, the ANU will continue to present the CIW as its high-profile 'hub' for a wide range of China-related work. Others, however – both inside and outside the ANU – will see a shell.

¹⁷⁷ *China Studies Review: Report of the External Review Panel*, 25 November 2017, p. 10.

¹⁷⁸ *China Studies Review: Report of the External Review Panel*, 25 November 2017, p. 10.



Vice-Chancellor Brian Schmidt during Chinese New Year celebrations, 2018. Image: ANU Photography.

The Ramsay Affair

In late 2017, the ANU became the first University to enter into detailed negotiations with the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation to run its new degree and scholarship program. Funded by a bequest worth over \$50 million from Australian health care magnate Paul Ramsay, the University took the offer seriously. As well as a major financial boost to the University coffers, the partnership presented opportunities for trained classicists, medievalists, historians, philosophers and biblical and literary scholars. Some staff and students flagged concerns about the partnership online, but overall the early negotiations with the Centre proceeded smoothly, if with some degree of secrecy and unease.¹⁷⁹ However, the tone of the talks changed abruptly following the publication of an article by Prime Minister Tony Abbott in which he described the Ramsay Centre's ethos as 'not merely *about* Western Civilisation but *in favour* of it.'¹⁸⁰

By June 2018, the University decided it could not agree to the Centre's prescriptive demands and withdrew from negotiations. The decision attracted criticism from conservative politicians and commentators. Schmidt and Chancellor Gareth Evans went to some lengths to explain why the discussions had broken down. 'The University retains full control of all curriculum and staffing decisions', they wrote in *The Australian*. 'This is the crux of the issue here for us. In this case, the

¹⁷⁹ Sherryn Groch, 'Academics fear autonomy at risk', *Canberra Times*, 25 May 2018, p. 10.

¹⁸⁰ Tony Abbott, 'Paul Ramsay's vision for Australia', *Quadrant*, 24 May 2018.

donor sought a level of influence over our curriculum and staffing that went beyond any existing arrangements we have.¹⁸¹ Evans later revealed that representatives for the Centre had refused to negotiate over the name of the degree, rejecting ANU attempts to add the word "studies" to the title and demanding to sit in on classes to monitor content. Of greatest concern was the Centre's refusal to commit formally to the principle of academic freedom.¹⁸²

The ANU missed out on a significant injection of funds. In the end, however, the University decided that without the assurance of complete autonomy, it risked losing more than it stood to gain. Above all, in a ruthlessly competitive market, the deal threatened those most elusive and valuable commodities: academic integrity and the prestige that comes with it. Having overplayed its hand with the ANU, the Ramsay Centre went elsewhere. The University of Queensland and the University of Wollongong began offering Bachelor of Arts in Western Civilisation in 2019. In February 2020, the Australian Catholic University became the third institution to sign an agreement with the Centre and offered courses from 2021.

Grand Challenges Scheme

If there is a single program that encapsulates Schmidt's personal style and vision for the ANU, it is the Grand Challenges Scheme (GCS). Launched in 2017, the GCS diverts \$50 million from the NIG towards a special program that supports 'transformative research on intractable global problems' and the 'major challenges confronting society.'¹⁸³ While the ANU has always pursued transformative research, the GCS encourages researchers to work outside their disciplinary silos and, perhaps more significantly, pursue work that addresses a more immediate public need.

The Scheme, right down to the novel application process, demonstrated a strong orientation towards undertaking applied research that serves the broader community. Winning GCS funds marked a significant departure from how funding is typically distributed across the University or the way researchers compete for grants

¹⁸¹ Gareth Evans and Brian Schmidt, 'Why ANU knocked back the Ramsay Centre proposal', *The Australian*, 26 June 2018, p. 12.

¹⁸² Sherryn Groch, 'Chancellor urges caution on any Ramsay deals', *Canberra Times*, 5 October 2018, p. 7.

¹⁸³ *ANU Annual Report*, 2018, p. 66.

through the ARC or the NMHRC. Each year teams pitch their proposed research through a short video presentation supported by just two pages of documentation. Short-listed applicants then present their ideas at a public event and answer questions from a live audience. The final decision rests with a special committee led by the Vice-Chancellor. This approach — more theatrical in pitch than Australian academics are used to — owes much to Schmidt's North American heritage and its traditions of spirited oral debate and competition. The 2017 inaugural Grand Challenges Scheme winner was 'Our Health in Our Hands: Future Personalised Medical Technologies for a sustainable and effective Healthcare', which aimed to revolutionise the treatment of diabetes and multiple sclerosis with wearable sensor technologies.¹⁸⁴

The GCS was also expected to influence how research is undertaken across the University. Decades of specialised research devoted to making 'incremental' intellectual and scientific progress — while necessary to extend disciplinary boundaries — has tended to push research away from the public eye. According to the ANU's Annual Report in 2018, this investment in 'blue-sky and high-risk activities recognised for bold leaps' was part of a 'deliberate effort ... to change the culture among academics.' In this sense, the GCS attempts to counteract a trend towards a more conservative research culture that can become constrained by short-term outcomes, a trend that has, in part, been driven by academic performance metrics and the need to win grants. Schmit has often used the term 'risky' to encourage potential applicants for GCS support to move beyond the promise of narrow, prescribed 'national benefit' and focus instead on opportunity, speculation, imagination and creativity.

The GCS's ambitions seem abstract, even bizarre when set against today's preoccupation with performance indicators and bibliometric evaluations. Unwittingly perhaps, the guiding principles of the Grand Challenges Scheme hark back to the very formation of the ANU and the great hopes for the ANU as a resource for tackling big problems in the national interest. But in 1946, those issues were relatively clearly defined within the ambit of national policy and nation

¹⁸⁴ ANU Annual Report, 2017, p. 60.

building. The scale of potential research synthesis and international pressures is much greater now. Even so, if many aspects of contemporary academic life would be strange to the pioneers and early scholars of the University, the spirit of the Grand Challenge Scheme would have been instantly recognisable to them.

Finding the balance between experimental work with less specific outcomes and bankable advances is, however, not a new concern. In the 1990s, as the ANU first wrestled with measuring the impact and quality of its research, Geoffrey Brennan, as Director of RSSS, reminded his colleagues to lift their eyes to the horizon. The 'only real measure of "success"', he told them, 'the only proper yardstick for our future is our capacity to produce great scholars and nurture great work – work that in a hundred and fifty years' time will be seen as truly major.'¹⁸⁵

For all its novelty, the GCS is a clear nod to the ANU's intellectual traditions: the description of the GCS as an 'investment, rather than a grant' is steeped in the language once used to describe the Block Grant and the core functions of the IAS. In keeping with the changing political landscape in which the ANU finds itself today, the GCS is also a highly strategic demonstration of the NIG and the critical research it enables. The Scheme reminds those who hold the purse strings that the NIG, and the ANU, is making good on its founding mission for a bold program of groundbreaking, long-term research with the public interest at its heart.

'A basket of people': The implementation of the College system

In the early 2000s, the idea of corralling the ANU's diffuse and divided campus into a simplified and intuitive operational hierarchy was compelling. While this was never going to be a mere rejigging of the University's organisational chart, few members of the ANU community could have predicted how difficult and disruptive the implementation of the so-called 'College system' would be. Indeed, the apparent simplicity of the new arrangements belied the profound nature of the changes. This recalibration called into question many of the traditions that had sustained the ANU since it began.

¹⁸⁵ Foster and Varghese, *The making of the Australian National University*, p. 410.

In 2009, historian Stephen Foster, co-author of *The Making of the Australian National University*, suggested that 'one of the tasks for a future historian will be to consider how well the new system has worked.'¹⁸⁶ Without an archive of official documents covering the recent past, it may still be too soon to attempt an assessment. Nevertheless, some preliminary observations are made here based on a reading of independent School reviews undertaken between 2006 and 2020.

When assessing the new model, it is important to remember that it was not based on a detailed analysis of what operational arrangements would best suit the University. Instead, it was an expeditious device intended to mash the two halves of the University together. The precise governance arrangements under the new regime were always going to take time to work through. Further, the rollout of the College system took place during a time of unremitting change to the tertiary education sector in general and the way the ANU was funded and managed in particular. Budget shortfalls, the reduction of the NIG, the reliance on competitive grants, the dependence on international fee-paying students, job insecurity, and worsening staff-student ratios have placed additional pressure on ANU staff and the business systems governing how they work. It is impossible to disentangle the forces reshaping the ANU from the myriad issues that came with a fundamental reorganisation of academic practice.

Creating the new structure was only the beginning. In many ways, it was the easy part. Changing the workplace culture to match the promised benefits of the new model was something else entirely, a challenge that Vice-Chancellor Ian Chubb knew well. Perhaps more than any vice-chancellor in the history of the ANU, Chubb had experienced the full force of academic resistance to his authority. While the Vice-Chancellor won the day, and many staff accepted the need for change, scepticism and resentment of the new model ran deep.

There are very few vantage points from which to objectively measure the temper of the ANU as it transitioned to the College system. For every School or Centre that successfully negotiated the change, another became inward-looking and moribund. Despite a perception that staff in the humanities were the most critical of

¹⁸⁶ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian University*, p. xiv.

the new vision, independent reviews conducted during the 2010s show that the sciences experienced difficulties adjusting to the College model.¹⁸⁷

Without strong leaders to drive change, the College system itself could not guarantee a research-led curriculum. If anything, the marriage of research and teaching had shown how quickly the emphasis on high-quality education could be lost.¹⁸⁸ The Research School of Chemistry (RSC) merged with its Faculty counterpart, the Department of Chemistry (DoC), in 2009. While the two groups had enjoyed a long history of collaboration, the union threw old tensions into sharper relief. Staff from the RSC, now expected to take on greater teaching responsibilities, worried about achieving a 'realistic balance' between teaching, research and the 'time consuming' burdens of administration. Staff formerly of the DoC reported feeling overworked but remained 'upbeat' about the prospects for the new School. Accustomed to being seen as the 'poor cousin' to the RSC, they pointed to their stellar research track records, often equal to their colleagues who had been spared the demands of a full teaching load.¹⁸⁹

A move from four buildings into a new \$90 million centre with state-of-the-art laboratories in 2013 did little to bridge the divide. In 2017, almost a decade after the merger, another independent review reported that '[a]lthough many areas of RSC have effectively adapted to the changed circumstances in which universities find themselves, there are significant "silos" and "pockets" in RSC which have not'. Some 'research only' staff had all but refused to teach, while others agreed with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. Staff described certain areas where the response to 'any change is passive-aggressive, coupled with a "sense of entitlement"; where collegiality and building community is resisted; and where uncivil behaviour and bullying and harassment appear to persist'.¹⁹⁰ Finding ways to arrest the problems were not immediately apparent. One reviewer recommended a compulsory workshop on

¹⁸⁷ This perception is sometimes conflated with the problems faced by the RSSS in the decade prior to the implementation of the College model. See, *The Research School of Social Sciences: Report of the 2006 Review*, September 2006, which found the School in 'crisis'.

¹⁸⁸ Some public responses to the restructure reflected a concern that teaching standards were secondary to research output. See Letter to the Editor, *Canberra Times*, 2 February 2010, p.8.

¹⁸⁹ *Report on the 2008 Review of Chemistry*, ANU, April 2008, p. 9.

¹⁹⁰ *School Review Report: Research School of Chemistry*, 2017, p. 15.

'appropriate workplace behaviour' but conceded that it is 'not easy to ensure that those who would most benefit from the workshops [will] attend them'.¹⁹¹

Some parts of the University slipped into decline. By 2019, problems at the Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering (RSEEME) had become so acute that the University authorised a dispute resolution expert to conduct a 'cultural audit' of the School. In his final report, Ken Grimes, a former head of the ANU Legal Office, explained that the problems he observed 'seemed to result from the merger of the two foundation academic units ... when the ANU embarked on the College structure' in 2009. Unravelling them, he warned, 'will be challenging'.¹⁹² Morale was low, and some staff refused to attend School meetings. Grimes also identified an unintended consequence of the new model. Academics who had previously neglected their research to focus on teaching now embraced the opportunity to focus on new projects. 'Education champions from a few years ago have now disengaged, retreated into research', one staff member recalled.¹⁹³ Early and mid-career staff, typically on fixed-term contracts, shouldered much of the teaching load.¹⁹⁴ The lack of transparency and equity in the distribution of work only deepened the dissatisfaction. Staff 'retreated into their own research and teaching, resulting in minimal interaction with colleagues, and very little collegiality and mentoring or support of junior colleagues', reported another.¹⁹⁵ Those who continued to devote themselves to teaching felt their work was unrecognised and undervalued. One respondent observed wryly that the School had now become 'more IAS than [the] IAS was', by which they meant it had developed a 'narrow, research-oriented culture' that saw teaching as an irritating imposition on their research time.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ *School Review Report: Research School of Chemistry*, 2017, pp. 15-6.

¹⁹² Ken Grimes, *Summary of Report into the culture of the Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, May 2019, p. 1. Grimes had been Head of the ANU Legal Office between 2001 and 2015. At the time Grimes undertook his review he was no longer employed by the ANU and was Principal of Katamaru Legal and Investigation.

¹⁹³ Ken Grimes, *Summary of Report into the culture of the Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, May 2019, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ *School Review Report: Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, 2019, p. 7.

¹⁹⁵ *School Review Report: Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, 2019, p. 5.

¹⁹⁶ Ken Grimes, *Summary of Report into the culture of the Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, May 2019, p. 5.

The RSEEME was not the only School experiencing difficulty adjusting to the new system. Staff at the Research School of Earth Sciences acknowledged the need to 'adopt new pedagogical approaches in addition to cultural change in the attitudes of some academics to education.'¹⁹⁷ At the JCSMR, 'the new culture' of teaching and research, when combined with staffing changes and a lack of clarity over performance measures, had heightened anxiety levels among academic staff.¹⁹⁸

Grimes reported that student experience at the RSEEME had 'plummeted', and enrolments had declined along with it.¹⁹⁹ The School had degenerated so much, according to one employee, that it was now 'inhibiting and even stifling staff from reaching their full potential'.²⁰⁰ Worse, the 'cultural malaise' afflicting the School had encompassed an increase in 'sexist behaviour', and an 'individualist and masculine culture' continued to prevail despite recruiting more female staff. As a result, Grimes believed the School remained 'a difficult environment for women to thrive'. He recommended that the University seek more detailed feedback about the School's workplace culture, especially from PhD students. 'I accept that a recommendation of this kind could be confronting, but the value derived from candid feedback outweighs the negatives.'²⁰¹

Elsewhere, the intellectual and social climate could not have been more contrasting. At the Research School of Biology (RSB), the College system seemed to herald a new era in productivity and collaborative endeavour. In 2009, the RSB brought together the Botany and Zoology Division, the Division of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and the Research School of Biological Sciences. In 2017, an independent review commended the new School for its handling of generational change and the impact of a reduction in the number of technical staff, its strategic use of the NIG, and the high quality of its PhD program. In addition, the School enjoyed a 'dynamic atmosphere' where a 'collaborative spirit' pervaded many of its

¹⁹⁷ *School Response to Review Report: Research School of Earth Sciences*, 2016, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ *School Review Report: John Curtin School of Medical Research*, 2017, p. 12.

¹⁹⁹ Ken Grimes, *Summary of Report into the culture of the Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, May 2019, p. 5; *School Review Panel Report: Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, 2019, p. 9.

²⁰⁰ *School Review Report: Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, 2019, p. 2.

²⁰¹ Ken Grimes, *Summary of Report into the culture of the Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, May 2019, pp. 5-6.

activities. This was no accident, the review noted, but the result of 'astute academic planning' and the hard work of the staff. The Panel had been especially impressed by the leadership team's efforts to 'raised the profile of teaching within the School and encouraged participation from diverse members of RSB'.²⁰²

In the new era, smaller academic units tended to lead the way, with many illustrating the benefits of clear leadership and strategic planning. For example, in 2018, the School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet) was lauded for its 'action-oriented interdisciplinarity' and a workplace culture that supported 'collegiality and intellectual generosity'.²⁰³ Likewise, a 2019 review celebrated the Australian Centre for the Public Awareness of Science as a 'leading model for interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches' with a 'vibrant' workplace that 'allows intellectual freedom, creativity and experimentation'.²⁰⁴ For the University Council, their success was proof that the College system could overcome the past problems, but only with a sustained effort from staff working in concert with academic leaders.

The shift from collegiate to managerial structures have radically changed the responsibilities and expectations of academic leaders. Managerial governance models – with their emphasis on quality assurance, staff appraisal, subject evaluations, strategic planning and management – extend back to the Dawkins reforms of the late 1980s and the desire for greater accountability across the education sector.²⁰⁵ Never a simple job, heading up a research school or department in recent decades has become more demanding, requiring an ever-growing array of skills and knowledge, and an increased attention to individual performance, engagement and impact. Academic leaders spend time attending and reporting at meetings, managing their staff, developing strategic plans, applying for grants, and answering gyres of emails. They must remain across complex financial reports, monitor expenditure, and authorise staffing decisions. They have less time to teach, write or undertake research. Above all, academic leaders must support and inspire

²⁰² *Panel Report: Review of the Research School of Biology at the Australian National University*, 2016, pp. 2, 8.

²⁰³ *School Review Panel Report: School of Regulation and Global Governance*, 2018, p. 9.

²⁰⁴ *School Review Panel Report: Australian Centre for the Public Awareness of Science*, 2019, pp. 2-3.

²⁰⁵ See, Stuart Macintyre, Andre Brett & Gwilym Croucher, *No End of a Lesson: Australia's Unified National System of Higher Education*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2017, pp. 231-37.

their colleagues while promoting the value of their work to the rest of the University and the public. At times of significant reform, they are expected to make difficult decisions about which research projects are funded, which courses can be taught, or which of their colleagues might be 'performance managed'. Opportunities for acrimony abound.²⁰⁶

Finding academics willing to take on management and leadership roles has never been easy. Finding those with the energy to rebuild fragmented and fractious Schools is trickier still. RSEEME, for instance, had four directors in five years.²⁰⁷ Similarly, an independent review of the JCSMR in 2017 suggested that a long succession of short-term directors had harmed the School's performance and reputation.²⁰⁸

The new system demanded effort from everyone, not just those at the top. Apathetic or disengaged senior staff members unwilling to contribute towards the running of their Schools could hinder the work of the most dedicated academic leader. A 2016 review of the Research School of Computer Science (created in 2011 by the amalgamation of the Department of Computer Science and the Computer Science Laboratory) declared that 'the future looks bright for the School in a number of areas'. At the same time, the Panel worried that despite possessing 'good individual leaders', disaffected senior staff had made it difficult to set a clear strategic path 'by the school for the school'. They reported that: 'There are too many disengaged senior professors, and the school is operating as a basket of people that lack cohesion in many areas.'²⁰⁹

Adjusting to the new model has been hampered by the loss of administrative and professional support staff. These individuals – who were often long-serving employees with deep knowledge of the University's creaking business systems — were once on hand to find innovative solutions to the new problems created by the College system. Over time support personnel have steadily been made redundant,

²⁰⁶ For an example of the responsibilities of academic leaders to lead strategic development of their Schools, see, *School Review Report: Research School of Chemistry*, 2017.

²⁰⁷ Ken Grimes, *Summary of Report into the culture of the Research School of Electrical, Energy and Materials Engineering*, May 2019, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ *School Review Report: John Curtin School of Medical Research*, 2017, p. 4.

²⁰⁹ *Review of ANU Research School of Computer Science*, 2016, p. 10.

centralised, or their positions not readvertised when they retire. Some positions have been filled on a casual basis or are funded only for the duration of a particular project. Importantly, the centralisation of many support functions has made it difficult for officers to maintain face-to-face contact with the people they serve.

But the University has lost more than technical support, administrative services and corporate knowledge. The pastoral care support staff provided (to students and academics alike) helped turn a cold and impersonal institution into a more humane one. Administrators such as Julie Gordon and Jude Shanahan recall their role in 'creating a community within the Division of Pacific and Asian History during the 1980s and 1990s. Their office was a hive of activity, a place where 'people came to get stationery, stamp mail, type and gossip.' Personal and Divisional landmarks were celebrated here: birthdays, fieldwork departures and experiences, and 'most importantly the celebration of newly acquired PhDs.'²¹⁰ They organised seminars, booked accommodation for visiting scholars and dignitaries, and helped the technologically challenged with new software and computer systems. Ann Buller, an administrator for the Department of Anthropology, recalls her duties extending to arranging to store students' personal belongings while away on fieldwork. 'Thankfully, I had an understanding partner', she remembered, 'as more often than not the department ran out of space and the area under my house would be used.'²¹¹ In my own experience at the ANU, they gently reminded a self-absorbed doctoral student of the world beyond the University. The social bonds they helped forge, which had allowed collegiality and *esprit de corp* to flourish, are now harder to sustain.

While the College system has had mixed results in changing academic attitudes and practices, it does not appear to have made good on its promise to improve administration procedures or operational clarity. (Nor has it produced a more meaningful guide to the University's activities for the outside world.)²¹²

²¹⁰ Jude Shanahan and Julie Gordon, 'The Fly on the Wall of Room 4225', Brij Lal and Alison Ley (eds.), *The Coombs: a house of memories*, Canberra, ANU Press, 2014, pp. 207-9.

²¹¹ Ann Buller, 'Coombs Administration', Brij Lal and Alison Ley (eds.), *The Coombs: a house of memories*, Canberra, ANU Press, 2014, p. 224.

²¹² Rae Frances, 'Future Structure of the College of Arts and Social Sciences', Discussion Paper, CASS Strategic Retreat, February 2021, p.2.

Removing the structural divide between teaching and research has introduced new barriers to the efficient operation of the University. As one respondent wrote in a review of Mathematical Sciences Institute in 2019, 'The College walls are high'.²¹³

These obstacles are most apparent in research schools that work across different Colleges. For example, in 2018, four years since four broad disciplines merged to form the School of Languages, Literature and Linguistics (SLLL), the School still reported problems around lines of communication and the movement of money. Administrative complications, a report into the functioning of the SLLL noted, 'are largely overcome through the dedication, resilience and resourcefulness of individual faculty and professional staff.'²¹⁴ However, some 'structural problems', most often concerning financial processes, seemed intractable. For example, some staff in the SLLL complained that the budget for sessional teaching was not revealed until shortly before the beginning of the semester, leaving a rush to find tutors who could start work at short notice.²¹⁵

The ANU's 'overly complex administrative processes' have long been an in-house source of frustration and embarrassment.²¹⁶ In 2006, Ann Buller rather poetically expressed her concern at the rising tide of administrative work.

Like a creeping glacier ... the demands placed on administrators (at all levels) have increased. There are organisational demands which have increased a hundred-fold. Forms, more forms, and yet more forms seem to dominate everybody's lives these days. There are forms to ask for extra funding; forms to spend that funding; forms to report it to government. Forms. Think of any activity within the Research School and there will be a form for it.²¹⁷

Buller also observed the increasing complexity of financial management ('an immense task') and the continuous search for outside funding caused by the

²¹³ *School Review Panel Report: Mathematical Science Institute*, 2019, p. 10.

²¹⁴ *School Review panel report: School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 2018, p.18.

²¹⁵ *School Review panel report: School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 2018, p.18.

²¹⁶ *School Review Report: School of Art and Design*, 2017, p. 17.

²¹⁷ Ann Buller, 'Coombs Administration', Brij Lal and Alison Ley (eds.), *The Coombs: a house of memories*, Canberra, ANU Press, 2014, p. 226.

reduction in the NIG. These tasks had become more onerous as budget cuts and restructuring forced the rationalisation of support personnel.

With the increasingly outward-focused nature of the University's work and the more complex arrangements that underpin them, these obstacles have affected its public reputation. For example, the Mathematical Sciences Institute recently entered into a partnership with the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), the goals of which include research collaboration on topics related to ASD's mission and building national capability in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), including training future generations of signals intelligence and cybersecurity professionals. The ASD committed three staff members to establish the partnership but told a review panel that they felt the ANU was 'less organised' than expected. Their comments to the Panel captured a widespread opinion from outsiders who conduct business with the ANU. They reported that relations between individuals were 'impeccable', but they had been frustrated at the 'difficulties and slowness in developing the ASD-ANU relationship successfully at an institutional level.'²¹⁸

In some Schools, the consequences of the University's inadequate business systems have been more severe. Since the 1990s, the ANU has relied heavily on competitive grants to fund research projects. Winning grants has become an indicator of academic performance and status. Grants are not only a boon for individual scholars. The money can be used to pay for research assistants, technical support and scholarships. But grant money rarely covers the total cost of research. Typically, universities must cover various costs not met by the grant, including in-kind support, physical workspaces, salary increases, equipment, and unforeseen project costs. Schools might also take on the costs of finding staff to cover their teaching loads and other administrative tasks usually performed by the people working on grant projects.²¹⁹ Grants might work to build short-term expertise; they can create expectations of long-term commitment.

The reliance on grant money, endowments and philanthropic donations has made the financial management of each academic unit more complex.²²⁰ Without

²¹⁸ *School Review Panel Report: Mathematical Science Institute*, 2019, p. 9.

²¹⁹ Universities Australia, *The Facts of University Funding*, 2017, p. 6.

²²⁰ Hannah Forsyth, *A History of the Modern Australian University*, NewSouth Publishing, Sydney,

constant monitoring, even the most successful grant-winning Schools could find themselves in financial trouble. In 2016, the School of Culture, History and Language (formed following the break up of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies in 2010) found itself blindsided by a financial crisis. Grant money had been pouring in, but overspending had gone undetected for years. To resolve the impasse, the University demanded that the School lose several positions. Publicly, Schmidt blamed the School and the University's business systems. 'The School has hired more people than it can afford to pay long-term', he said on ABC Radio. 'The issues around the School should have been picked up earlier ... It's due to the complexity that we have within the University finance system'.²²¹ Privately, the University took a tougher stance, dismissing internal suggestions about how to minimise the impact on students and staff. Instead, a committee was formed and tasked with identifying twelve staff members to be redeployed or made redundant. Some staff found positions in other Schools, while others took early retirement. Everyone who saw their names on that list felt angry and betrayed.

Reviews show that the transition to the College system has been halting and uneven. Finding effective leaders, improving administration systems and lines of communication remain the most pressing issues for the University. Nevertheless, reform is underway, and more will be necessary in the future. For example, in February 2021, executives from the College of Arts and Social Sciences considered whether to disestablish the Research School of Social Sciences (one of the University's foundational academic units) and the Research School of Humanities and the Arts. Both are widely considered to have become confusing, costly and 'unnecessary layers of management'.²²² By mid-year, the College Dean, Rae Frances, decided to shelf the issue temporarily due to the disruptions caused by Covid-19. What value the University attaches to the historical significance of those names remains to be seen. But with their removal from the College of Arts and Social Sciences operational hierarchy, the last vestige of the old IAS will be gone.

2014, pp. 146-8.

²²¹ 'ANU flags job losses as part of restructure of Asia-Pacific school', *ABC Radio Canberra*, 18 April 2016.

²²² Rae Frances, 'Future Structure of the College of Arts and Social Sciences', Discussion Paper, CASS Strategic Retreat, February 2021.

Cultural Change

Universities are papered with euphemisms. At the ANU, in recent decades, one stands out. 'Cultural change' or 'cultural problems' have become a catchall encompassing a wide range of issues and behaviours. It can include building a more collaborative and inclusive intellectual environment, adapting to changing working arrangements (namely how to perform more work with fewer resources), and addressing bullying, harassment, sexism and other disrespectful behaviours. Most cultural change has occurred away from the public gaze. By citing privacy concerns, the University has deflected media-led investigations and the reputational damage they cause. The few notable exceptions to this pattern include the troubles at the School of Music in 2012 and a series of complaints made in 2014 about a 'toxic culture of bullying' at the School of Politics and International Relations.²²³

Few 'cultural' issues have proven as intractable as sexual assault and harassment. Formal measures to address bullying and other inappropriate behaviours (including sexual assault) have been in place at the ANU since the 1990s. Before this, most misconduct allegations were handled in-house or, more commonly, went unreported. The University conducted its first campus-wide survey into discrimination and harassment in 2001. The first substantive review of the codes of conduct that apply to students living in residence did not occur until 2009, when Ian Chubb responded to a slew of complaints about sexual harassment and discrimination at John XXIII College.²²⁴ Even then, it was evident that the University's sexual assault policies were applied inconsistently across the different residences.²²⁵

The next major overhaul of policy and procedures for responding to allegations of sexual assault occurred in 2014, when Richard Baker, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Student Experience, oversaw the development of a new staff protocol for responding to an allegation of recent sexual assault. The ANUSA supported the

²²³ Emma Macdonald, 'Toxic bullying claims at ANU', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 2014, p. 1; Emma Macdonald, 'ANU bully claims taken to watchdog', *Canberra Times*, 17 June 2014, p. 6; *Woroni*, 24 July 2014.

²²⁴ Louis Andrews, 'Capital College at Centre of Sex Row', *Canberra Times*, 14 November 2009, p. 1. *Canberra Times*, 14 November 2009. Reports of hazing and other initiation rituals at the College also appeared in the media in 2018. Emily Baker, 'Calls for action as ANU College's hazing detailed', *Canberra Times*, 28 February 2018, p. 8.

²²⁵ Tara Shenoy, 'Procedural Unfairness: Sexual assault at the ANU', *Woroni*, Vol. 66, No. 9, 2014, p. 1.

new measures with a 'Safety on Campus' campaign, using social media and awareness events to shift understandings of violence away from victim-blaming culture. In July 2014, pastoral care providers, including Heads of Residence, student leaders and community coordinators, undertook a training program that included presentations from the Canberra Rape Crises Centre and ANU Counselling Centre. In addition, the ANU Women's Department and ANUSA organised workshops and panel discussions focusing on developing a better understanding of consent. In 2015, about 380 student leaders attended a day of training that covered how to respond to unwanted sexual attention and other intervention strategies.²²⁶

The success of these reforms is difficult to quantify. But it would seem that a decade of reviews, training, social awareness campaigns and new protocols were not enough. In one of the more depressing developments in the University's recent past, in August 2017, a national survey by the Human Rights Commission found that 3.5 per cent of ANU students reported being sexually assaulted on campus during the previous year. At more than double the national average, the news was shocking. Despite concerns about the survey's accuracy, the Vice-Chancellor moved quickly, issuing a video apology to victims and promising to 'do better'.²²⁷ A more detailed response came almost two years later, with the formation of the Respectful Relations Unit as the key group charged with addressing sexual violence on campus. The Unit's strategy included an online sexual assault reporting tool, plans to engage male students, a focus on drug and alcohol abuse, a trial of first responders network of University staff, and a sexual misconduct policy.

Schmidt described the strategy as 'a new beginning' for ANU, an opportunity to address 'one of the worst scourges that we have in Australia and on our campus':

I acknowledge that we have taken more than two years to get to this point today ... That has not been because we didn't think it was important. It is

²²⁶ Richard Baker, 'Preventing unwanted sexual attention in our community', *Woroni*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 2015, p. 17.

²²⁷ Guy Rundle, 'Rundle: AHRC uni sexual assault report seriously flawed and endangers academic freedom', *Crikey*, 8 August 2017.

because it is hard, we haven't gotten everything right, and for those who have been let down by the University in the process, I apologise.²²⁸

For student campaigners, the wait had been too long. In 2020, they remained critical at the speed and extent of the University's response to the survey, concerned that students continued to be 'let down by a system and an institutional culture that has been slow to change.'²²⁹ In the same year, a former student successfully sued John's XXIII College for failing in its duty of care and its 'inadequate handling' of a sexual assault complaint in 2015.²³⁰ In August 2021, students disrupted Schmidt's launch of the University's new strategic plan, protesting the slow pace of change and the failure to release de-identified data relating to sexual assault and harassment disclosures.²³¹

Change has been slow. Nonetheless, it is also important not to lose sight of the significant improvement in the attitudes and behaviour of academic and professional staff that have been achieved.²³² Pornographic images no longer adorn laboratory walls or other communal spaces.²³³ 'He' is no longer the default pronoun in Orientation and Faculty handbooks. No longer are female administrators referred to as 'girls', expected to make hot beverages or address their superiors by their full academic titles. Further, the collegiate governance models of the past tended to overlook, ignore, or protect staff known to have engaged in inappropriate behaviour. Although staff might complain about the additional administrative burden of new performance management tools and other accountability measures, they have helped make the University a safer and less sexist workplace.

Other changes to the workforce have hampered the pace of reform. Careers in the higher education sector are hard to come by and require great dedication to

²²⁸ ABC News Online, 21 November 2019.

²²⁹ *Canberra Times*, 29 July 2020.

²³⁰ Stewart, 'Former ANU Student Successfully Sues John's College Over Sexual Assault during 'Pub Golf' Ritual'', *ABC Premium News*, 7 August 2020.

²³¹ Sarah Lansdown, 'Students call out Australian National University over 'broken promises' in sexual assault response', *Canberra Times*, 4 August 2021; ANU Women's Department, *Broken Promises: An ANU Women's Department, ANUSA and PARSA Report into the State of SASH Progress at the ANU*, 2021.

²³² Forsyth, *A History of the Modern Australian University*, pp. 138-40.

²³³ *Brian Schmidt: Interview with Daniel Oakman*, 9 July 2021.

sustain. Even with the promise of anonymity, the consequence of reporting inappropriate behaviour can be personally and professionally damaging. In addition, the increasing numbers of casual and contract staff, who have the most to lose by speaking out, have made it more difficult to expose and remedy problematic workplace cultures.

Taking responsibility for issues not of his making has been a defining feature of Schmidt's leadership. During his time at the helm, he has acknowledged more institutional failings than any of his predecessors. He has done so with a level of public disclosure equally unprecedented. Yet, the focus on organisational culture has diffused blame and obscured accountability. While the ANU has undoubtedly become better at supporting victims and managing the symptoms of its 'cultural problems', it has failed to identify more precisely the root causes of misconduct and wrongdoing. During the debate, bigger questions have gone unasked or unanswered. Why, in a workplace that includes some of the most highly educated members of society, was a special unit required to ensure respectful and dignified conduct? Is there something about university culture, or even the ANU in particular, that made it resistant to change? Schmidt thinks not, commenting in 2021:

What you saw is that we are a reflection of society. The amount of sexual harassment and assault within the University is about the same as you see throughout society That survey in 2017 showed we were just like everywhere else ... I actually don't think we are different except for that we are more transparent than the rest of society, and we do own up to these problems in ways that other places don't. And there are consequences when you do that because you get slammed in the media because the media looks for people putting their head above the parapet. I'm proud of what we've done, but I'm also sad that we haven't been able to do more.²³⁴

As of early 2020, 4,335 students lived on campus in ANU administered residences.²³⁵ As the ANU continues to expand its on-campus student accommodation to have the

²³⁴ Brian Schmidt, Interview with Daniel Oakman, July 2021.

²³⁵ *ANU Annual Report*, 2020, p. 37.

highest proportion of students living on campus than any Australian university, the consequences of the kind of culture it allows to flourish are set to become an even more pressing issue.

The changing face of the ANU

In the 1990s, when the Howard government reduced university funding, enrolling extra international students to make up for the shortfall seemed a sensible approach. The ANU, along with other Australian universities, steadily increased its enrolments of private fee-paying international students. Twenty-five years ago, a little over 10 per cent of its students came from overseas. By 2020, the proportion has grown to 32 per cent or about 6,300 enrolments.²³⁶ Since international students pay more than domestic students, their contribution to the University's revenue is proportionately higher. In 1996, income from overseas students totalled about \$9 million per annum. By 2020, it was \$325 million per annum. What was just 2 per cent of the University's annual revenue is now over 20 per cent.

International students are increasingly discriminating and come from a wide range of countries. Attracting them is a competitive business and is now an indispensable part of the University's operations. Creating and promoting a successful and marketable identity has become an increasingly important priority, one that the University spends millions of dollars to achieve. The ANU opened its China Liaison Office in March 2017 to 'better manage and mitigate risk, build a brand profile, and manage relationships with government agencies and partner institutions.'²³⁷ The University opened liaison offices in Singapore in 2018 and Washington D.C. in 2017.

Raising the University's domestic and international profile has always been important to ANU decision-makers. As the need to attract non-government money and fee-paying students increased, so too has the need to present a marketable picture of the University. The creation of a 'corporate identity' — a phrase that was

²³⁶ Figures provided by ANU Performance and Management Division.

²³⁷ *ANU Annual Report, 2017*, p.41.

not applied to higher education providers until relatively recently — has evolved gradually since the creation of the University.

For much of the University's early history, the ANU Design Unit brought visual unity to the campus environment. Established in 1954, the Unit worked toward an institution-wide design aesthetic and philosophy, from furniture and interior design to publication standards and signage.²³⁸ Cost-cutting and outsourcing in the 1980s spelled the end of the Design Unit. Any overarching influence over the design choices made by the research schools and departments went along with it. An audit of the ANU's visual identity in 1993 revealed that the University's crest and name appeared in 20 different formats on business cards and letterheads. Three years later, Vice-Chancellor Deane Terrell launched the University's first corporate style guide. 'The University needed to put in additional effort to promote a stylish and consistent face to the world – reflecting the highly professional organisation we are', he said at the launch celebration.²³⁹ Not everyone greeted the news with the same zeal.

For some, the ANU's lack of corporate sheen was a badge of honour, evidence that the Institution busied itself with weightier issues than fonts and colour schemes. Terrell had listened to the doubters for years. 'The countervailing view is that this is all PR film flam', he said, sounding a little defensive, 'no more than unwarranted central interference'.²⁴⁰ Terrell, who was at the forefront of the ANU's efforts to bring international students to Canberra, also believed a more coherent brand would strengthen the University's local presence. As he explained: 'I only need note that last year a high proportion of federal politicians from all parties had not heard of the Institute of Advanced Studies.' The lack of identity was 'inimical to maintaining the support which is essential to our existence.'²⁴¹ To the makers of the ANU in the 1950s — who enjoyed almost unquestioned faith in the importance of their work — this would have seemed a rather curious use of time and resources. To

²³⁸ Derek Wrigley, *The ANU Design Unit: Design Awareness in the Modern University, 1954-1977*, Canberra: ANU Heritage, 2019.

²³⁹ *ANU Staff News*, 15 May 1996, p. 1.

²⁴⁰ *ANU Staff News*, 15 May 1996, p. 1.

²⁴¹ *ANU Staff News*, 15 May 1996, p. 1.

the managers of the ANU today, it is simply a necessary part of the business of higher education.

Efforts to 'brand' and promote the University have escalated in step with the increasingly competitive nature of research funding and the market for students. It has also extended to how the scholarly community must operate. One of the criticisms made of the IAS (although former staff strongly refuted this assertion) was that it had become too insular and needed to project itself beyond the academy.²⁴² In 2018 a review took the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics to task for its apparent failure to recognise and celebrate its social impact. The report stated that: 'The School does not yet have a clear, compelling narrative of the societal relevance and value of its research and educational activities.' While the value of their work may have been:

self-evident for many in the School, they do not seem to be aware that these contributions are not obvious to those outside the School, and especially those outside the Humanities. Our impression as a Panel is that this is a failure of communication, not of actual achievement.²⁴³

In the modern University, quiet, understated achievement is no longer enough. That SLLL now includes an Institute for Communication in Health Care and a Centre for Research on Language Change, alongside a Centre for English, Screen Studies and Drama and a School of Classics is testament to this adaptability, renewal, opportunity and pressure.

Excellence Everywhere

'To fulfil our mandate, we must invest in, and insist on, excellence everywhere at ANU'

*ANU Strategic Plan, 2017-2021.*²⁴⁴

²⁴² *University with a Difference*, 2004, pp. 56-9.

²⁴³ *School Review panel report: School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 2018, p.13.

²⁴⁴ *ANU Strategic Plan 2017-2021*, p. 2.

The ANU has embraced the boosterish language of the corporate boardroom with the same enthusiasm as other Australian universities. It is intended to inspire confidence. Often, it generates the opposite. Job insecurity, overwork, and a culture that demands 'relentless' improvement and 'excellence in everything' have produced a new kind of fatigue. It can be hard to see in the coloured tee-shirt wearing student in marketing promotions or behind the gleaming façade of the latest buildings. But it is there.²⁴⁵

Universities are potent concentrations of human endeavour. They are places where bright and inquiring minds turn their intellects to some of the most critical questions and challenges facing humankind and the planet. Emotions run high, and the quest for knowledge can be intoxicating. They can be hard places too, where spirits are dashed.²⁴⁶

University careers have never been easy, even during the times of relative affluence in the 1960s and 1970s. In recent decades, an already challenging job has become even more difficult under the ratcheting pressure of short-term contracts, career uncertainty, and dehumanising metrics used to assess research performance. Relative to the average wage, academic employees at the ANU today enjoy better pay than their colleagues did in the 1990s.²⁴⁷ Yet, they work with less support, teach bigger classes and supervise more students. They are expected to publish more and for their work to achieve measurable impact. In 2015, a year before he became Vice-Chancellor, Schmidt described the career pathway for younger scholars as 'savage' and something that needed to change.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ See, Stuart Macintyre, et al., *No end of a lesson*, pp. 214-37. Almost every review of the performance of the research schools at the ANU since the early 2000s report an increase in the anxiety and stress experienced by university employees, primarily due to job insecurity, heightened expectations around research and the pressure to attract external money.

²⁴⁶ For example, see interview with Mary Bouquet, Assistant Registrar at the ANU from 1965 to 1985 in which she mentions the 'big box of Kleenex in the bottom drawer of her desk' for the academics who had been reduced to tears in her office: 'I've had big, strong men in tears in my office, too', she recalled. Daniel Connell, *Interview with Miss Mary Bouquet*, 11 September 1990, ANU Oral History Archive, ANU Archives.

²⁴⁷ Since the late 1990s, wages have improved across all levels. However, the compounding effect of percentage-based pay increases have resulted in even larger pay increases for staff working at higher levels.

²⁴⁸ Ellie Bothwell, *Brian Schmidt: universities must back young researchers to win Nobel prizes*, The World University Rankings, 2015.

Of all the changes to the ANU since the 1990s, the reduction in tenured positions has been the most destabilising. In 1996, the University had 3,655 full time, permanently employed staff. (The number of casual and part-time staff were not published, presumably because the totals were relatively low.) Research outputs have increased, and enrolments have almost tripled, from 10,143 to over 26,000). Yet, in 2020, the number of full-time, permanently employed staff had fallen by nearly a thousand to 2,789. Over the same period, those on casual or fixed-term contracts rose to 1,167, around one-third of the workforce.²⁴⁹

According to historian Hannah Forsyth, casual and short-term employees have shouldered a disproportionate amount of the extra pressure to excel in the Australian higher education sector. As she explains in *A History of the Modern Australian University*, non-tenured academics 'operate in a world of aspiration and ambition that fills them with desire, trepidation and sometimes despair.' Failure to publish or win grants has been 'internalised as inadequacy', she writes. The tenure to non-tenure ratio at the ANU is better than most Australian universities. Nevertheless, the University's response to the problem has been to offer support and training, solutions that tend to shift responsibility towards individuals without challenging the root cause of the malady. The current clutch of courses on offer at the University promise to 'build resilience', 'courage' and 'emotional agility' while addressing 'unhelpful thinking patterns' and fostering 'habits of positive thinking'.²⁵⁰ The troubling and often unseen impacts of these issues have been around for decades. Forsyth describes a cartoon from the *Australian Higher Education Supplement* in 1990, during the first phase of the Dawkins revolution, where an overworked academic says: 'I used to blame Dawkins for all my problems, but now I have starting to think it was me all along.'²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Forsyth, *A History of the Modern University*, p. 139. Changes in employment patterns are harder to identify, in part because the University outsources work to private companies and the people who perform those tasks are not directly employed by the ANU. Differences in the way statistics are collected and reported make precise comparisons difficult. Further, the ANU is chary about revealing too much detail, lest they attract negative publicity and damage the University's brand.

²⁵⁰ <https://services.anu.edu.au/training/becoming-a-resilient-researcher>;
<https://services.anu.edu.au/news-events/resilience-and-courage-intermediate-sdhr10>

²⁵¹ Forsyth, *A History of the Modern Australian University*, p. 149. See also, Judith Brett, 'The Bin Fire of the Humanities', *The Monthly*, March 2021, pp. 20-27.



The Coombs tearoom, 1964. Image: ANU Archives, ANUA226-411-2.

Although difficult to quantify, the atmosphere in some research schools at the ANU has changed over recent years. Current and former staff members mention the closure of the 'tea service' at the Coombs Building in the early 2010s as an emblem of broader changes to academic culture and the increasing commercialisation of the campus. For almost half a century, the Coombs tearoom had been a hive of activity for staff and students, nourished by inexpensive tea, coffee and biscuits. It 'bustled with animated conversation at morning and afternoon tea about the most serious issues of the day, about war and peace and footy results and cricket scores', recalled Emeritus Professor Brij Lal. The tearoom also provided a more stable climate than individual offices, which were over-heated by the central hydronic system during the winter or baking hot in summer. The often-vibrant space was not without its pitfalls. It could be a comfortable trap for the procrastinator, a place where deadlines evaporated, and urgent tasks could be put off to the next day or beyond. By the early 2010s, the tearoom had been 'abandoned', Lal wrote, 'unable to compete with more popular upmarket coffee outlets elsewhere around

the building, and the old culture of collegiality and conversation is now largely a vanishing memory.²⁵²

Nostalgia coats many memories of the Coombs tearoom and its equivalents across the university. While it was undoubtedly a place for convivial discussion, interactions could also be clubbish, masculine and hierarchical, reflecting underlying tensions between individuals and groups. Scholars Claire Wright and Simon Ville point out that 'tea-room culture' has suffered from the rising number of short-term and sessional staff who 'demonstrate a more limited commitment to the conventions of the individual workplace.'²⁵³ The forces arrayed against the Coombs tearoom were considerable. But the quality of coffee on offer must not be overlooked as another factor that hastened its demise.

It is easy to exaggerate the loss of collegiality that the closure of the Coombs tearoom might suggest. Advances in communication technology mean that professional exchange is now online and global. Face-to-face discussions still occur at conferences, seminars, lectures and tutorials, not to mention at the eateries and cafes that pepper the campus. The interactions might be less serendipitous, but they are not restricted to who happens to be in the tearoom at a given time. Perhaps the lament for the particular brand of collegiality represented by the Coombs tearoom is yet another university euphemism for a less harried way of life.

Still different

Every University is shaped by its history. But the ANU's debt to the past is especially strong. Created in the aftermath of the Second World War, Australia's only national University signalled a new direction for tertiary institutions. Intended to reach outward rather than gaze inward, the ANU was a unique expression of confidence in research and education to harness the intellectual energy of the people and achieve national prosperity.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Brij Lal, 'Preface', Brij Lal and Alison Ley (eds.), *The Coombs: a house of memories*, Canberra, ANU Press, 2014, xviii.

²⁵³ Claire Wright and Simon Ville, 'The University Tea Room: informal public spaces as ideas incubators', *History Australia*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2015, p. 253.

²⁵⁴ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University*, p. 19.

The University grew quickly and confidently. In 1980, ANU Council member and former Chairman of the CSIRO, Frederick White, described the ANU as the 'academically outstanding child of the Federal Government'. His phrase neatly captured the University's unique foundations as well as its sometimes-precocious reputation. Staying with White's metaphor, the ANU grew into something of the middle child of the Australian university family. It possessed neither the well-worn traditions of its 'sandstone' siblings founded in the colonial era. Nor did it have the rumbustious political edginess of the 'gumtree' universities, born in the suburbs of the state capitals during the 1960s and 1970s. As it matured, the ANU has carried itself with the prepossessing confidence of a high-school prefect, somewhat aloof from its peers and proud of its special status.

History, of course, is an unreliable guide to the future. And, in the final decades of the twentieth century, the special compact between the ANU and its political masters showed the first signs of strain. As the financial and political environment in which the ANU found itself began to shift, the University faced an invidious choice. It could fight to preserve the status quo. Or it could adapt to the changing times. In choosing the latter, the ANU started a slow turn from the structures, methods and traditions central to its early history and identity, traditions that had brought it national and international acclaim.

The University's commitment to its national mission has never wavered. But, three decades of neo-liberal economic reform, changes to education policy, and wrenching internal reorganisation have shaken the ANU from its historical moorings. Two changes, in particular, left the ANU deeply unsettled. First, the ballast provided by the NIG, which had been an expression of national confidence in the University and its long-term research program for over half a century, has become lighter. (Indeed, the future of the NIG remains uncertain, and research schools are discouraged from becoming overly reliant on it as a source of income.)²⁵⁵ Second, the IAS, which had been the institutional embodiment of the ANU's original mandate for over half a century, has been dismantled. In the new era, some parts of the University thrived while others turned in on themselves. Given the extent of the

²⁵⁵ For example, *School Review Report: John Curtin School of Medical Research*, 2017, p. 14.

disruption, it is remarkable that the ANU has maintained, if not extended, its status as a leading university. The trauma of its rebirth has almost passed. But it will likely be another generation before its long shadow has disappeared completely.

Schmidt is more effusive and less combative than his predecessors. His empathetic communications and adept use of social media, including a weekly blog, has been well suited to the times. It is easy to forget that his time at the helm has been beset by a seemingly unending series of public issues. Soon after taking the job in 2016, a brief controversy preceded the demolition of the historically significant Bruce Hall to make way for a new residence with significantly higher capacity. Schmidt defended the University's vigorous expansion of on-campus student accommodation, which he hoped would enrich the campus experience for students and boost future income for the University.²⁵⁶ Just as the problems at the School of Music started to recede from the headlines, a dispute over budget cuts at the School of Culture, History and Language gained increased media attention.²⁵⁷ In 2017, the Human Rights Survey into sexual harassment demanded his full attention. Then, the Ramsay affair hove into view. In February 2018, amid a major reconstruction of the central precinct of the university, a sudden flood surged into the Chifley Library, destroying over 100,000 monographs, extensive archives of micro-fiche and micro-film, and damaging decades of information collected between library staff and academics. Later in 2018, concerns around foreign interference in university research took a more sinister turn when the ANU fell victim to a sophisticated cyber-attack that allowed hackers to access two decades of personal information. Worse was to come.

During the first quarter of 2020, the ANU experienced a sequence of events unprecedented in their fury and long-term impact. In early January, poor air quality due to the smoke from bushfires that raged across the eastern seaboard forced the closure of the Acton, Mt Stromlo and Kioloa campuses. Two weeks later, a severe hailstorm caused millions of dollars of damage to the Acton campus and made some

²⁵⁶ Clare Colley, 'No plans' in place to bulldoze Bruce Hall', *Canberra Times*, 8 April 2016, p. 2.

²⁵⁷ Emma Macdonald, 'ANU backs away from fixed-term Asian language teaching contracts', *Canberra Times*, 20 April 2016, p. 1; William Sima, 'Celebrating academic excellence by axing school', *Canberra Times*, 29 March 2016, p. 5.

significant buildings uninhabitable for months (or, in the case of University House, into an undefined future). One person was admitted to hospital. Then, in March, the Covid-19 pandemic began. None of this has dimmed Schmidt's passion for leading the ANU into perhaps the most challenging periods in its history. As the pandemic took hold, the University announced his reappointment for a second term until 2025.

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed the risks of tying the future of higher education to the volatile international student market. The ensuing financial crisis also revealed how far universities have fallen from their once-celebrated place in the national imagination. Sympathy and financial support have been in short supply. An injection of \$1 billion to the sector has covered only a fraction of the estimated \$4 billion in lost revenue.²⁵⁸ Columnist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Elizabeth Farrelly, best captured the sentiment and the *schadenfreude*:

I'm not sorry for the universities ... Their willing self-transformation from genuine educational institutions into greedy, profit-chasing corporations that raise fees, lower standards and pour billions into huge new buildings to attract fee-paying "international" students while refusing to divest themselves of fossil-fuel investments make this a long-warranted correction.²⁵⁹

Farrelly's characterisation was intended to jolt, but she overlooked any sense of how Australian universities became part of a global market of students in the first place. The corporate structures that Farrelly and others railed against are still in place. Nor is there any sign that the crisis will prompt a reassessment of how the sector can reduce its dependence on fee-paying students. The best universities can hope for is a speedy return to the status quo.

For the ANU, a healthy operating surplus helped cushion the blow. Still, the shortfall triggered the most significant contraction in the University's history, with

²⁵⁸ Robert Bolton, 'Unis face a five-year 'depression' in research', *Australian Financial Review*, 15 February 2021, p. 14; Andrew Norton, 'The 2021-22 budget has added salt to universities' COVID wounds', *The Conversation*, 13 May 2021.

²⁵⁹ Elizabeth Farrelly, 'Great lockdown a sledgehammer smashing dreams forever', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April 2020, p. 28.

the loss of around 465 jobs. Once again, the ANU's special status offered no protection. It celebrates its 75th anniversary in the wake of one of the most damaging periods in its history.

* * * *

Difference has always been central to the ANU's self-perception. Since the 1990s, it has become an increasingly important feature of its marketing strategies. At the same time, in a competitive environment where government money is hard-won, the assertion of the ANU's special case demands a deft touch. Accept the cash without fanfare or showing what has been done with it, and the ANU might appear complacent or ungrateful. Crow too loudly, and the University risks the ire of those who are not granted millions of research dollars based on little more than a quirk of history. Nonetheless, in recent years the ANU has moved to reassure the Government that its special tranche of funding is well deserved and well spent.

What made the ANU unique was once self-evident. It required no promotion, explanation or justification. In a more competitive environment, the University must assert its difference alongside other institutions trying to do the same. The relative distinctiveness of the ANU among higher education providers is still the subject of animated discussion among current and former staff. Some believe that government policies and funding cuts have weakened the ANU, forcing it to adopt the same business model as other Australian universities. The result, they argue, has left the University unable to resist the homogenisation of the sector, overly dependent on fee-paying students and corporate investment. Others, while not discounting the impact of education policy, are critical of how willingly the ANU embraced the language and business practices of the corporate world, outsourced parts of its workforce, and jettisoned collegiate governance models. One sentiment unites both camps: that the ANU is still different, but it is less different than it once was.²⁶⁰ For his part, Schmidt has spoken publicly about the particular challenges facing the ANU, from the constraints imposed by government funding policies to the distorting

²⁶⁰ For examples see interviews conducted by the ANU Emeritus Faculty Oral History Project, especially interviews with Adrian Gibbs, Jim Fox and Angela Giblin.

effects of the global ranking systems.²⁶¹ Although his misgiving about rankings has not dissuaded the University from using them to attract new students, both from Australia and abroad. In 2019, Schmidt broke with recent trends and capped undergraduate enrolments as part of a plan to recast the ANU as a small, elite and distinctive university. His decision echoed the recommendation of the 2004 Schreuder Review that the ANU needed to resist the expansionist trajectory of its larger rivals in state capitals.²⁶²

The ANU defies easy judgement. It always has. Depending on where one looked on campus, the last three decades have seen periods of affluence and growth, as well as periods of relative stagnation and austerity. In 2009, historian Stephen Foster alluded to the importance of a historical perspective for those charged with mapping the future of the ANU. He commented that 'there is little chance of effectively planning an institution's future directions without a clear understanding of its past.'²⁶³ History, too, can be seen as an obstacle to progress. In a rush to move with the times, the ANU has sometimes been reluctant to look back. Almost two decades have passed since Deryck Schreuder led the first whole-of-university review into the quality of research and education at the ANU. Although the state of flux that followed his assessment shows no sign of abating, the time seems apposite for another. At 75, the University can be proud to have fulfilled its foundational motto: 'First, to learn the nature of things'. Now, it must turn its perceptive gaze to learning more about itself.

In 2004, the Schreuder review panel believed that the ANU had entered the eye of a storm. In many ways, that storm still rages. The pressure on the University to fulfil its national mandate and responsibilities has never been greater. Yet, at the same time, it endures the Federal Government's palpable indifference to its plight.²⁶⁴ Amid a global pandemic and a looming environmental crisis, the future has rarely seemed less assured. Seventy-five years ago, in the aftermath of global war, the

²⁶¹ Jordan Baker, 'Global rankings distort decisions: Uni chief. 2020', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November 2020, p 1.

²⁶² *University with a Difference*, 2004.

²⁶³ Foster and Varghese, *The Making of the Australian University*, ANU Press, 2009. p. xiv

²⁶⁴ Julie Hare, 'He has a Nobel – but 'this is really hard' Brian Schmidt – Vice-Chancellor', *Australian Financial Review*, 19 June 2021, p. 41. See also, John Hewson, 'The Dumb Country', *The Saturday Paper*, No. 372, 28-29 October 2021, pp. 16-7.

nation entrusted the ANU to forge a new era in research and learning. On the cusp of another uncertain era, reinvigorating its unique compact with the government and the Australian people has never been more vital.

Author's note

This essay accompanies a web-based history project for the 75th anniversary of the ANU. 'Spirit of Inquiry' is currently available at <http://anu75.anu.edu.au/>

It was written without reference to an archival record of official documents or correspondence, primarily because one can scarcely be said to exist for the period after the early 2000s. However, documents relating to the history of every College and Research School are held digitally in servers and computers across the University. The recovery and marshalling of the records from this digital morass is a vital and urgent task.

Professor Nicholas Brown and the School of History have generously supported my work. Emma Cupitt has provided diligent and insightful research assistance. A host of other people and business units have also helped along the way: Amy Jarvis from ANU Heritage, ANU Archives, Strategic Communications and Public Affairs, Megan Easton from the Corporate Governance and Risk Office, Sarah Withers from the Planning and Performance Management Division, Jane Golley and Wil Sima from the Centre for China in the World.