Chapter 11
Commercialization and Corporatization: Academic Freedom and Autonomy under Constraints in Australian Universities

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11.1 Introduction

Australia is a democratic nation where academic freedom has been enshrined and defended by vice chancellors, academics, public servants, and politicians. While constraints on academic freedom of expression may therefore seem less than other countries included in this volume, they may just take a different form. With deregulation of previous caps on the number of students enrolled and subsequent “massification” (Coates et al. 2009) of higher education (HE) enrolments in Australia, the “enterprise university” of the early 2000s has morphed into “Higher Ed. Inc.” under hardened, budget-driven neoliberal reforms. Neoliberalism is taken to encompass an ideological agenda where “all goods and services can and should be treated as if they have an exchange value” (Gonzales and Nunez 2014). Articulated under commercialization and corporatization (C&C), neoliberal reforms have impacted Australian HE resulting in degraded academic work conditions, deprofessionalization and increased job insecurity, and an entrenched small core and larger casualized-peripheral academic workforce. At the same time, HE enrollments have increased under deregulation. While there has been robust defense of

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1As outlined by Universities Australia which publicly represents universities, vice chancellors in Australian universities have a dual role as “academic officer and chief executive officer for a university.” Chancellors are appointed as chair of the university council which is the governing body of the university. They “confer the academic awards of the university and represent the university at meetings, functions, and ceremonies” (Universities Australia 2018a, b).

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the academic right to speak out publicly, politically, systemic sectoral, and internal institutional pressures are structurally shifting the capacity for academic freedom and autonomy.

This chapter sketches Australian sectoral and cultural commitments to freedom of speech and more specifically academic freedom in Australia and depleted capacity for the exercise of academic freedom and autonomy within the academy. It then outlines the constraints accompanying the combined impacts of HE C&C and how these bear upon the complexities of academic freedom and autonomy: commercialization of research; the impact of cuts to HE government funding; shifts from education as a public to a private good; the impact of C&C on academic workloads and on professional autonomy; and impacts of increased reliance on international student fee income. This is linked to the last shift, the defense of academic freedom from foreign influence. Recent events have resulted in the defense of academic freedom of speech in the context of national debates on foreign influence in HE but amidst weakened academic capacity for academic autonomy and the clash of academic freedom against institutional commercial imperatives.

11.2 Legal, Cultural, and Sectoral Commitments to Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom in Australia

While universities in Australia are formally legally constituted under state and territory laws, providers are otherwise regulated nationally. In terms of governance, universities are self-governing bodies, overseen by councils or senates (to which vice chancellors report) and their academic boards (which oversee internal governance, teaching, learning, and research standards). Universities have autonomy to approve courses under self-accreditation, hire staff, and select students, seen today as a central hallmark of academic (institutional) freedom. Australian universities have autonomy or self-governance over staff recruitment, promotion and tenure processes; curricular design; and the appointment of department chairs, deans, and presidents (or vice chancellors in the Australian context).

Australian academics have enjoyed professional autonomy and academic freedom assumed under Western traditions as identified by Hao in this volume under the 1940 American Association of University Professors (AAUP) statement. While universities are self-accrediting, national oversight of quality standards is newly regulated by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), aimed at achieving regulatory uniformity,2 which commenced in 2012 in response to varying institutions’ standards and practices. National government regulation has recently set parameters under the Australian Quality Framework (AQF) and its regulator,

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2While higher education includes levels 6–10 in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (with some overlap between universities and other HE providers in terms of awards approved), discussion here uses the term HE to refer only to university-based education rather than post-secondary education in general.
TESQA, resulting in a shift from professional autonomy as a collectively shared practice (e.g., within disciplines), to externally evaluated accountabilities through generic teaching and learning standards and nationally regulated, specified teaching and learning outcomes.

The over-arching concepts of freedom of speech and expression have a degree of high-level protection in Australia via government endorsement of international rights covenants and treaties. As a signatory to the International Covenant onCivil and Political Rights (ICCPR), freedom of information, opinion, and expression are respected in Australia. Article 19 of the ICCPR states that “Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference” and the “right to freedom of expression (orally, in writing or in print), while also respecting “the rights or reputations of others” and with some restrictions for “the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals” (Article 19, ICCPR, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 1998; United Nations 2011).

Drawing on General Comment No. 34 Article 19 of the ICCPR, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2017) “emphasizes that freedom of expression and opinion are the foundation stone for a free and democratic society and a necessary condition for the promotion and protection of human rights.” This includes freedom of opinion and expression “essential for any society” (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017).

Bearing upon translation of freedoms of opinion and expression into the HE sector, these freedoms are linked to good governance and protection of human rights in Australia under Article 19, which states:

Freedom of expression is a necessary condition for the realization of the principles of transparency and accountability that are, in turn, essential for the promotion and protection of human rights (Article 19, para 3).

States parties are required to ensure that the rights contained in article 19 of the Covenant are given effect to in the domestic law of the State…. (Article 19, para 3) (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017 citing UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) 2011).

Australia is party to seven core international human rights treaties (Attorney-General’s Department 2017). Commonwealth anti-discrimination laws “together with the Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth), prohibit breaches of human rights and discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, social origin, age, medical record, criminal record, marital status, impairment, disability, nationality, sexual preference and trade union activity. The conduct prohibited may include speech or other forms of expression” (Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) 2015, 3.103).

Despite these ostensibly robust rights frameworks, a potential sticking point for enforcement of individual human rights complaints is that the Australian Constitution refers only to a handful of “rights-type provisions” (such as religious freedom of expression) and a few other rights implied from the text or structure of the Constitution (Saunders 2010: 120). They are referred to as implied rights “because these provisions tend to be expressed as limits on Commonwealth power, rather than as positive rights” (Saunders 2010: 120). Australia does not have a bill or charter of rights and responsibilities that would formally incorporate human rights...
(Zifcak and King 2013) and relies on the parliaments of the Commonwealth and States and the independent judiciary interpreting the common law (Saunders 2010). There is thus robust defense of the current protection of rights by both statutes and under the common law (Croucher 2016; Heydon 2013) as fundamental to democratic parliamentary governance, but no charter or bill positively asserting rights. Several parliamentary committees consider whether proposed bills are compatible with rights and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, established in 2011, has a more specific brief to assess compatibility with international human rights instruments ratified by the Australian Government (Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights 2017).

Australia has a strong track record of involvement in international recognition of human rights and was centrally involved in the 1960s establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But the former President of the Human Rights Commission 2012 to 2017 Gillian Triggs (2018) argues that Australia’s commitment to human rights has regressed from those principles. She cites as illustrations increased Aboriginal deaths in custody today (showing worse outcomes than found by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 25 years ago), laws in relation to secrecy regarding off-shore detention centers (now withdrawn), refugees being held indefinitely and without charge or trial, and new laws on foreign interference and espionage (Australian Government 2018). With this selective whittling away of rights, ratification of UN Protocols and Conventions is not sufficient protection for direct translation of rights into action and redress mechanisms or access to justice via the courts, and some argue that rights-related covenants need to be “expressly incorporated into Australian legislation” (Wright 2013).

Several recent inquiries into freedom of speech have highlighted some of the limitations of Australia’s approach to rights, including freedom of speech and expression, which bear particularly upon academic freedom and the exercise of the harm principle. Attorney-General Brandis initiated a “Freedoms Inquiry” by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC), and in 2015 the Commission undertook a review of the common law protection of rights and freedoms in Australia. The inquiry focused on those laws that may be seen to interfere with common law rights and freedoms “to ensure that laws that limit traditional rights and freedoms are thoroughly scrutinised and encroachments justified” (Croucher 2016). The Commission’s definition of freedom of speech “includes, but is not limited to, freedom of public discussion, freedom of conscience, academic freedom, artistic freedom, freedom of religious worship and freedom of the press” (ALRC 2015). Freedom of speech is described as “the freedom par excellence,” since without it, no other freedom would survive (ALRC 2016: 14).

Recent controversies over freedom of speech are a topic in themselves but have involved complex issues, particularly in relation to anti-terrorism, national security laws, anti-discrimination laws, and race-related debates, especially the scope of Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) and the public interest, for example, in relation to journalists, academics, and whistleblowers speaking out publicly. Exceptions have involved specific application and definition of exemptions to freedom of speech in the criminal laws, secrecy laws, contempt laws,
anti-discrimination laws, media broadcasting and communication laws, information laws, and intellectual property laws (ALRC 2015). Submissions to the 2015 ALRC inquiry criticized the lack of safeguards to protect public interest disclosure and the encroachment of limitations on rights (see, e.g., Castan Human Rights Centre (Fletcher and Joseph 2015); Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC 2015)).

Constitutional lawyer Professor George Williams identified “350 instances of laws that infringe upon freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of movement, the right to protest and basic legal rights and the rule of law,” with 209 enacted since 2001 (Williams 2015: 10). He cautions: since September 2001, enacting laws or regulations that infringe democratic freedoms has become a routine part of the legislative process. Basic values such as freedom of speech are not only being impugned in the name of national security or counter-terrorism, but for a range of mundane purposes. Speech offences now apply to a range of public places and occupations, and legislatures have greatly expanded the capacity of state agencies to detain people without charge or arrest. Such offences have become so normal and accepted that they can be turned into law without eliciting a community or media response (Williams 2015: 9).

Unlike countries such as South Africa, where “academic freedom and freedom of scientific research” is encompassed under the right to freedom of expression under article 16 of the South African Constitution, Australia is the only “democratic nation of the world that does not expressly protect freedom of speech in its national Constitution or an enforceable national human rights instrument” (Williams 2018). So, although Australia has a tradition of common law and statutory protection of basic freedoms including freedom of speech or expression, critics argue the fact that Australia does not protect freedom of speech in its Constitution and the lack of a charter of bill or rights or explicit legal instrument results in weak legal/institutional protections and a whittling away of rights by exceptionalism (Saunders 2010; Williams 2015: 2018). Importantly, under the Higher Education Support Act, every university is obliged “to have a policy that upholds free intellectual inquiry in teaching, learning and research” (Universities Australia 2018a).

11.3 Depleted Capacity for the Exercise of Academic Freedom and Autonomy Within the Academy

Australia is a self-professed democratic nation where freedom of expression is supported and actively defended and promoted. Academic freedom is encompassed both publicly and within universities, as self-managing autonomous entities with control over teaching and learning, personnel employment choices, research, and enterprise, within broader laws. Academic freedom of expression has been tested and upheld in cases of unpopular views being expressed publicly. In one such example, Professor Mirko Bagaric, head of Deakin University’s Law School, in a joint 2005 article with Dr. Julie Clarke, argued that torture is defensible in extreme circumstances, for example, where interrogation of a terrorism suspect could avert
harm to many (Bagaric and Clarke 2005). In the midst of wide-ranging national and international criticism from academics, torture survivor groups, and civil libertarians, the university defended academic freedom of expression, and the authors were not sacked or sanctioned by their university. In light of these events, the then Minister for Immigration Amanda Vanstone said that Bagaric would be removed as a member of the Refugee Review Tribunal and reiterated that Australia is a signatory to the UN Convention Against Torture. But at the same time, she defended academic freedom as “a cherished part of Australian cultural life” (AAP 2005).

Vice chancellors have publicly defended freedom of academic expression (Universities Australia 2018a). Responding to public reactions to a report on the 2012 independent inquiry into the Australian media, conducted with former Federal Court Judge Ray Finkelstein and University of Canberra (UC) Professor Matthew Ricketson, UC Vice Chancellor Professor Stephen Parker stated:

The University of Canberra is committed to academic freedom. We staunchly defend the right of our academics to write, speak and debate ideas in their area of expertise. Just last year we stood up to legal threats by a large, influential media organisation against a lone UC academic. We will no doubt be called upon to defend academic freedom again (Parker 2012).

Despite formal public defense of freedom of speech within the academy, the exercise of power over freedom of opinion and expression takes different forms, and the subtle workings of self-censorship need to be addressed within the marketized competitive sector discussed below under the interacting themes of corporatization and commercialization. Drawing on Lukes’s (2005) three dimensions of power, the impact of neoliberal managerialism on academic autonomy is multilayered. Strong or direct use of power (Lukes’s first dimension) may be exercised through hierarchical exercise of top-down managerialism by, for example, sackings and forced redundancies. Controlling the agenda through agenda setting (e.g., course restructuring as a means of forced staffing redundancies) illustrates Lukes’s second dimension. The third more subtle form of power is embodied in discourses, practices, and implied understandings that set the parameters of acceptable deviation from pro-organizational norms and control over staff behavior.

In the book The Establishment and How They Get Away with It, British journalist and broadcaster Owen Jones (2015: xvii) pointed out the subtleties of power embedded in routine practices and argued it is “the system” – the Establishment – that is the problem, not the individuals who comprise it. New forms of academic command and control operate through Foucauldian capillaries of power, disabling the academic capacity to exercise academic freedom and rewarding performativity that accords with institutional political correctness. This may occur as discussed below, when commercial imperatives trump academic autonomy and, for example, staff are told to alter course content that may be offensive to fee-paying international students because of their government’s policies. Bourdieu spoke of “academic capitalism” as a form of cultural capital. Taking this notion, Fraser and Taylor (2016: 3) argue that academic capitalism is “a term that can be used uncritically to champion free-market capitalism and the commodification of knowledge, labor, and everyday life; where specific forms of knowledge and professional expertise become the
‘hard currency’ of an entrepreneurial university.” C&C encapsulate the mechanisms used in trends articulated internationally, to transform HE from educational knowledge production into markets.

11.4 Corporatization and Commercialization of HE Policy Reforms Under Neoliberal Reforms and the Impact on Academics

Against the backdrop of Australian and international legal and governance mechanisms related to protection of human rights, freedom of speech and expression, and ways of theorizing depleted capacity for the exercise of academic freedom and autonomy within the academy, C&C are central over-arching interpretive concepts. The policy reform agendas under corporatization and commercialization of government and HE institutional policies, underpinned by neoliberal ideologies, are highly relevant to structural constraints on the sector (in particular, reduced government investment in HE funding) and diminished work conditions for academics, alongside management cultures silencing dissent and stymying autonomy.

Corporatization encompasses the emphasis on managerialism, efficiency, and productivity characteristic of New Public Management reforms that swept across governments with reforms going back and forth between Australia, New Zealand, Britain, and the USA from the 1980s. This was predicated on assumptions that the public sector needed to learn to adopt more efficient private sector models of management and administration. The 1980s heralded an era where managerialism and efficiency in Australian HE mirrored federal and state governments’ focus on public sector efficiency and performance-based appraisal, modeled on applying private sector models to public sector entities. Senior executive staff in universities adopted similar practices to senior public sector managers employed on contracts for undisclosed salaries and with backgrounds not necessarily in academia, engaged to steer universities as commercial enterprises.

The focus on efficiency has brought increasing metrification and performativity to the academy, impacting on intensification of academic workloads, where individuals’ workload percentages on research, teaching, and service are determined in workload formulae on quantity (not quality) of measured outputs. These include numbers of students, hours of teaching, quantum of research grants from external sources, and publications in A-listed journals and books with top-ranked international publishers. Low-productivity academics are put onto teaching-intensive workloads that preclude time for grant applications and publications, resulting in a dual track system of teaching-intensive and research-intensive staff (see also Chap. 7 for similar practices in Macau). Courses and units within courses have been streamlined for mass delivery, with cloud learning previously used for off-campus delivery brought to on-campus and substituted for (more costly) face-to-face teaching. Staff performance appraisal based on constantly changing metrics has increased the
intensity of work, resulting in self-interested competitive individualism and gaming the system. As discussed earlier, this kind of competitive work environment alongside institutional pressures of commercialization breeds distrust and a reticence to speak out about conditions for fear of reprisal. This also acts as an internal silencing constraint on academic freedom of speech and professional autonomy in relation to their own work conditions that also act as constraints on research capacity. Fraser and Taylor (2016: 2) refer to the use of metrics in narrow determinations of academic value as a central plank in the marginalization of critical knowledge production.

Commercialization was entrenched in the Dawkins reforms from the 1987 White Paper under the Hawke Labor Government, which sought to link HE to the global economy and as an incubator for new-economy jobs. Foreshadowing the expansion of HE, introduction of student fees (transforming HE from a public to a private good) went alongside reduced public funding and the need for HE providers to develop more diversified funding sources. From the 1980s commodification of HE, economic productivity was no longer seen as deriving from government investment in education but like a product to be bought and sold in a globalized market (Davies et al. 2006: 311). The transition from elite HE from the 1980s to mass education (massification) under deregulation in the 2010s has been paired with restraints on government funding investment and continued government commitment to positioning Australia for global economic competition and promoting HE as an export product. Reduced public investment in Australian education and training has spurred the marketization of the Australian HE sector, as universities have increasingly relied on alternative sources of domestic and international student fee and private corporate funding.

In the context of these central over-arching interpretive concepts of C&C, key shifts within Australian HE impacting on academic freedom and autonomy are discussed below: commercialization of research; the impact of cuts to HE government funding; shifts from education as a public to a private good; the impact of C&C on academic workloads and on professional autonomy; and impacts of increased reliance on international student fee income. This is linked to the last shift: defense of academic freedom from foreign influence.

11.4.1 Commercialization of Research

The links between research and commercialization are reflected in the increased emphasis on Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage industry partnership funding and increased national government focus on rewarding universities for both ARC and non-ARC industry-/community-funded research, with the smallest amount of research funding allocated to the humanities (Universities Australia 2018a). The language of return on investment (ROI) permeates HE institutional strategic goals and management practices. In 2015, a report commissioned from Deloitte Access Economics by University of New South Wales (UNSW) estimated
the return on investment in university research was between $5 and $10 for each dollar invested, equating to an annualized return rate of 60–100%. In defense of government investment in research and training, UNSW Vice Chancellor Ian Jacobs called for the federal government to fully fund university research rather than force universities to increase costs to students. He argued, “universities are left out of pocket by about 27 cents for each competitive research dollar awarded and funding for research training has declined by approximately 30% on a per student basis since 2000.” He said research funding should not be viewed as a government donation to universities but as seed funding, yielding an economic return (Jacobs 2015). He later estimated at a $10 return to the economy for every $1 of funding spent on Group of Eight universities,3 worth $24.5 billion per annum for Australia (Jacobs 2018). While Jacobs acknowledges research rankings are deficient in recognizing other priorities, like “nurturing and rewarding those who make major contributions in areas such as teaching and learning, knowledge transfer, thought leadership, global development and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion,” he nonetheless defends these “imperfect rankings” as critical to a “virtuous cycle” for national and societal benefit (Jacobs 2018).

Investing more in research will improve outputs; better outputs will improve our rankings; better rankings ensure we remain attractive to international students, industry partners and philanthropic supporters; and all of this funds more high-quality research and the benefits that brings, both economically and for our society (Jacobs 2018).

While universities are struggling to adequately fund research, such arguments point to the broader problem, where discourses emphasizing commercializing research can lead to undervaluing the contribution of the humanities and social sciences, which are less explicitly linked to commercial outcomes than medicine and applied sciences (discussed below in terms of lower research funding). The ARC and the medical/sciences funding body, the NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council), fund research based on expert peer-reviewed academic applications. However, political interference was recently exposed during Senate Estimates hearings on the 2017 ARC Discovery grants process requiring reportage on whether ministerial veto had been exercised. It came to light that the former Education Minister Simon Birmingham had canceled 11 ARC Discovery projects worth AUD$4.2 million – all in the humanities – that had been short-listed in the top 10% under expert peer review (ARC Discoveries are intensely competitive with only an 18% success rate). Extensive public outcry highlighted criticism of the past use and exercise of ministerial veto on final approval of ARC research endorsed by expert peer review, the lack of transparency (the refused applicants were only informed they had not received funding, not the circumstances of the veto), and negative reaction to the current minister’s additional requirement that future grants address the impact on national interest to be assessed by the minister, not peer referees (grants

3The Group of Eight comprises the Australian National University, University of Adelaide, University of Melbourne, Monash University, University of Queensland, University of Sydney, University of New South Wales, and University of Western Australia.
are currently already judged on their arguments on significance of the research) (Piccini and Moses 2018; Universities Australia 2018a).

Universities Australia came out strongly critical of the minister’s veto on grounds it “erodes global confidence in Australia’s research program and our reputation for research excellence” and “also undermines academic freedom, by opening the door to any Minister deciding they don’t like a research topic – irrespective of its merits – that could transform knowledge in a field” (2018a). At their plenary meeting in October 2018, Universities Australia vice chancellors restated their commitment to academic freedom and intellectual inquiry.

Within universities, commercialization (driven also by national competitive funding) has led to adoption of aggressive approaches to patenting, commercialization of research product innovations, spin-off companies, and university-industry partnerships. Many universities now have private commercial entities sitting alongside public system teaching and research. As discussed later, these priorities are not in themselves detrimental and are part of a global trend in other developed countries that promotes universities as incubators of innovation. However, in a fiscally constrained environment of budget cuts, such priorities result in cost-cutting to HE faculties and disciplines seen as competitively low performing (notably, the humanities and social sciences) and a shift to investment where monetary profit is to be made, such as business schools and IT (Barrios 2013) and the sciences.

Private corporate benefaction can bring conflicts of interest. One such example is the controversy over the A$13 million donation by US corporation missile maker Lockheed Martin for the STELaR Laboratory at the University of Melbourne in a three-way partnership with the Defence Science Institute (Cook 2016). Australian universities have blocked research funding from tobacco corporations, and some are divesting their investments in coal; but divestment and research funding decisions are institution-specific, rather than sectoral or values-driven by peak bodies like Universities Australia (2018b), established in 2007 as the national body for the university sector, represented by university vice chancellors. Once corporate sponsors are accepted, open criticism by academics within a university can cause tensions and invite conflicts of interest and self-censorship within universities, limiting legitimate public interest criticism of ethical issues raised by research partnerships or the ethics of partners’ broader business activities.

11.4.2 The Impact of Funding Cuts to HE Government Funding

The decline in public investment in Australian HE has been influential on the increasing vulnerability of academics within an increasingly marketized system. In the 1970s, the Australian government provided approximately 90% of universities’ incomes. Upon coming to power in 1975, the Whitlam government made tertiary education free. However, this was short-lived, and core Commonwealth funding to HE was substantially reduced by the early 2000s. HE in Australia changed dramatically between 1975 and 1989, from the short-lived Whitlam Government-initiated
free tertiary education reforms to the 1980–1990s Hawke Government’s (Dawkins era) reforms.

In a series of tertiary education reforms between 1987 and 1991, Labor Education Minister John Dawkins introduced student fees under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) (a scheme later copied by Britain) and amalgamated 19 universities and 46 Colleges of Advanced Education into 36 public universities (Bexley 2017). Under what have become increasingly ramped-up neoliberal reforms, universities were redefined as competitive enterprises subject to public sector management efficiency reviews, leading to the collective term “the enterprise university” coined by Marginson and Considine (2000) and elaborated later (Marginson 2002). The 2002 collection, Scholars and Entrepreneurs: The University in Crisis (Cooper 2002), highlighted the post 9/11 laments of the decline in universities’ capacity to undertake their traditional role in societal cultural transformation and the changes brought by “the fusion of intellectual practices and market forces” between “the academy and the market.” Commenting on the privileging of instrumental over intellectual “cultural-interpretive” practice, Cooper argued at the turn of the century:

At first it seems ironic that the further we progress towards a “knowledge society” the harder it is for universities to sustain themselves…. the semi-autonomous status of the university is collapsing as the institution increasingly merges or competes with private capital for education and research funding (Cooper 2002: 2).

The marketization of HE is well illustrated with universities engaged in “market-like behaviours at unprecedented levels and from an offensive rather than a defensive position” (Gonzales and Nunez 2014). In Australian HE, the neoliberal reform agenda is exemplified by Commonwealth Government cuts to HE funding (and decline in government support paid per student), the deregulation of student enrolments in a competitive HE market, increased student fee contributions from the initial flat fee, the introduction of demand-driven university student funding in 2012 (with price caps only for what universities could charge for undergraduate courses in medicine), and increased reliance on international student fee income. This was played out across the Australian HE sector by increased emphasis on applied sciences and vocational disciplines and job cuts in the humanities, which were seen as less proficient in income generation (Macintyre 2002).

In the 2000s, public Commonwealth government funding for HE continued to shrink. Despite the 2008 Bradley Review of Higher Education Funding recommendation for a 10% increase in Commonwealth funding to student places (Bradley et al. 2008), Australian government funding fell to 42% in 2010 and, for some universities, to as little as 20% in 2015 (Mc Phee 2014). This was followed by a raft of reforms in the 2010s pressing for mass tertiary education (“massification”) as a national goal linked to up-skilling the workforce of the future but within a dominant narrative of individual benefit (and cost). In 2012, the cap on university undergraduate enrollment numbers was lifted, with degrees mainly funded by a combination of national government Commonwealth grants and student loans paid to universities. Student loans under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) are later
repaid by students when they earn over a certain threshold after graduation. This has led to situations where universities award student places below advertised marks cutoffs resulting in accusations of treating students as “cash cows” for Commonwealth government funding through HECS student debts (Bagshaw and Ting 2016).

Universities’ funding has been stripped by successive national budget cuts by both sides of politics. The Labor government’s 3.5% cut in 2013 resulted in an effective reduction of A$3.2 billion (Davis 2015), and A$2.8 billion was cut to university funding in 2017 under the Liberal Coalition Government (Universities Australia 2017a). Further national budget cuts to HE in 2017 included a 2.5% “efficiency dividend” (to the government)4 applied to government Commonwealth Grant Scheme payments to universities for 2018 and 2019 and a tightening of the HECS-HELP student loans program. In practice, the 2.5% cut has meant reductions of over A$50 million for some universities (Monash, Western Sydney, Queensland, Sydney and Deakin) and marginally less for other universities. Representing university vice chancellors, Universities Australia opposed the cuts, which government had justified citing vice chancellors’ salaries, university reserves, and university administrations’ advertising and marketing expenditures, as evidence of university budget surpluses.

Students are also paying a higher percentage of the costs of their degrees with payments commencing at a lower threshold. The 2017–2018 budget announced a 1.82% annual increase in student contributions to the High Education Loan Program from January 1, 2018 (a 7.5% increase over the forward estimates), while lowering the income threshold of payment from the 2017 level of about $55,000 a year to a new, much lower level of $42,000 a year (Bexley 2017). Under the Higher Education Reform Bill 2017, Commonwealth-supported students are paying more than 50% of the cost, and nearly one fifth will be paying more than 90% (Universities Australia 2017a).

Students will pay 46% instead of 42% of the cost of their degree on average. So for a four year course, this is an increase in total student fees of between $2,000 and $3,600. The government claims the maximum any student will pay is $50,000 for a four year course, and $75,000 for a six year medical course (Croucher 2017).5

The Department of Education and Training commissioned analysis by Deloitte, based on conceptions of “reasonable costs,” hinges “on a defined construct of quality and the efficient cost at which this can be achieved and which, in turn, differ across fields of education and depend on staff-student ratios, proportion of casual

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4The National Tertiary Education union states that “Universities have already had a very significant efficiency dividend imposed upon them by a change in the indexation arrangements for university grants moving from the Higher Education Grants Index (HEGI) to the consumer price index which the PBO estimates will save the government in the order of $3.7 billion over 10 years” (Hare 2017).

5In the past, the government has claimed to subsidize on average around 60% of the actual cost of higher education to students, with the student paying the remaining amount (student contribution amount) to the approved provider (Department of Education and Training, 2015, p. 8). This is now no longer the case.
teaching staff and relative levels of efficiency applied” (Deloitte Access Economics 2016: iii). Despite Deloitte’s caveats on the validity of comparisons over time due to different methodologies, the government used Deloitte’s estimates of trends in teaching costs to argue that HE is overfunded (Bexley 2017). Universities Australia counterargued in relation to university funding that the number of students in Commonwealth-supported places – 469,588 in 2009 – grew to 606,691 (an increase of 29%), but “in real (inflation-adjusted) terms, funding under the Commonwealth Grants Scheme per university place grew by less than one per cent each year between 2009 and 2015” and from 2018 “funding will no longer increase in real terms.” Public investment in university infrastructure decreased from almost $1.4 billion in 2009–2010 to around $170 million in 2016–2017 (Universities Australia 2017b, 6). As Professor Peter McPhee, former Provost of University of Melbourne observed, “universities may still be ‘public spirited,’ but they are no longer publicly funded.” Ironically, he says, “the generation that is running the country” were the recipients of publicly funded university education (McPhee 2014). These structural changes have shifted the place of HE in Australia from public education/research and knowledge investment to a system dominated by economic imperatives based on income generation and cost cutting that form the environment within which academics work.

11.4.3 Shifts from Education as a Public to a Private Good

These budget and policy shifts confirm the shift from HE as a public good to increasingly being a private individual responsibility, notwithstanding government rhetoric of its continued support. Cutting HE funding (equivalent to a A$380 million reduction in 2019 (Bexley 2017)) to pay for promised support for disadvantaged school reforms recommended by the Gonski Report pitched one sector of education against the other, rather than government prioritizing education across the board. Irrespective of caveats on comparisons over time in the Deloitte report used to justify the HE budget cuts, the government argued that cuts to universities are merited in light of large HE expenditures on infrastructure projects, government criticism of high vice chancellor salaries, and university surpluses or invested savings discussed earlier. Universities have been extolled to become careful financial managers but are then punished for it. For the first time since the 1980s Dawkins era, the reforms point to a decoupling of teaching and research and a dedicated proportion (7.5%) of Commonwealth Grants Scheme funding contingent on each university’s performance against benchmarks, for example, on newly introduced graduate employment outcomes and satisfaction (Croucher 2017).

Controversially, and illustrative of segmentation within the HE sector between older well-endowed “sandstone” universities (Group of Eight) and the more recent teaching-intensive universities, the Group of Eight universities have called for deregulation of student fees to address the funding gap between government income and teaching costs. That this is supported by the Group of Eight elite privately endowed but also publicly funded universities that garner 67% of national
competitive research funding (Ferguson 2019) and top the research rankings illustrates the competitively based bifurcation of the Australian university sector. A two-tiered status system is driven by the capacity of the Group of Eight to garner corporate, industry, and philanthropic alternative sources of funding added to their historical benefactions, land holdings, and government and industry research grant performance. But whether this system is delivering quality education as a national public good is debatable.

Despite education being the number one export in states like Victoria and the third-ranked export nationally behind coal and iron ore, students will be paying more and getting less, because after these neoliberal budget-driven reforms, universities will have to do more with less in a competitive environment dominated by Commonwealth budget cuts. As part of a globalized trend where rankings are reshaping HE (Hazelkorn 2016), performance on international HE rankings based on research performance are linked by university managements to international student choice of university and hence to income. As outlined by Andrews et al. (2016: 1), “research performance is perceived as critical to student recruitment, with institutional research performance and world rankings being used as a measure of institutional status.”

Domestically, research performance defined by Research Quality Framework (RQF) and the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) rankings has resulted in universities using teaching funding to subsidize research (Hamilton 2018). In 2008, 40% of research expenditure (A$2.7 million) was reportedly cross-subsidized to research from the Commonwealth Grant Scheme and Student Fee Income (Larkins 2011). This is not to derogate the role of research but to point out that declines in government investment in research and teaching have had perverse outcomes and that such practices risk intrinsically linking research to income generation rather than pursuit of knowledge and broader national benefit.

11.4.4 The Impact of C&C on Academic Workloads and on Professional Autonomy

Commercialization along with budget cuts, a volatile international student market, and a deregulated domestic student market has impacted the composition of the academic workforce and academic workloads. A core and periphery staffing model has evolved to most efficiently deliver HE, which involves concentrating core teaching loads on permanent academic staff (some of whom are deemed teaching-intensive) and about two thirds of delivery (marking, tutorial teaching, and sometimes whole unit responsibility) on casual and limited term (contract) staff, who are usually teaching-intensive with little research-teaching and a limited research academic career trajectory. As confirmed by Bexley, James, and Arkoudis (2011: 1) and Lama and Joulié (2015), casuals constitute around 60% of HE teaching staff.
As shown in Table 11.1, the higher education academic workforce has expanded (which would be expected due to rising student enrollments). But “tenurial” jobs only grew 17%, while there was a contraction of limited term academic appointments and a 58% increase in casual employees. Many of the jobs created are precarious – casual or sessional. (Adjunct academics, usually retired academics, perform various tasks in exchange for access to facilities, including postgraduate thesis supervision and research.) Industrial regulation restricting flexibility via fixed-term appointments has also created incentives for universities to favor casual and sessional teaching appointments, alongside the devolution of employment appointments to schools and faculties (Andrews et al. 2016: 1). As shown in Table 11.1, there was a 58% increase in casualized university staff in Australia between 2005–2015. Division of the Australian University workforces into core and a casualized periphery with inferior work conditions results in an army of casuals. This props up some conditions for core staff (who may gain from the conditions of full-time employment like holiday pay, long-service leave, and superannuation, but who must also oversee a reserve army of casuals) but consigns casualized academic staff to the precarious secondary labor market.

Status as a casually employed worker undermines academic freedom. Casually employed staff are not formal members of identified institutional staff, and some work in a variety of HE workplaces with no real institutional “home.” This means they have little say over work conditions and rates of pay beyond strict legal requirements, and they constitute a highly vulnerable reserve army of HE labor (Barrigos 2013). Others employed on contracts are also highly vulnerable, leading to hesitancy to rock the boat in terms of complaining about excessive workloads or speaking out on issues potentially controversial for their employer (e.g., publicly criticizing the questionable ethical behavior of a major donor corporation). Tenurial staff can also be subjected to insider power plays where senior managers close ranks on staff speaking out about funding allocations or engage in unfair behavior on matters within their discretion such as workloads, denial of leave, or internal conference/research funding. Gendered hierarchies within the academy remain despite equal opportunity legislation (Sawer 2018). This is accentuated in the sciences where over half PhD graduates are female, but women are less than 20% of senior academics in Australian universities and research institutes (Academy of Science 2018).

### Table 11.1 Increase in academic precarious work 2005–2015 in the Australian University workforce

| Year | Casual | Limited term | Tenurial | Total |
|------|--------|--------------|----------|-------|
| 2005 | 13,529 | 24,446       | 55,826   | 93,801|
| 2015 | 21,363 | 12,829       | 65,523   | 99,715|
| % increase 2005–2015 | 58% | −52% | 17% |

Source: Table constructed from Changes in Australian University Workforce Gender and Contract FTE 2005–2015 based on Department of Education and Training data (Kniest 2017, 25)
Curiously, the substitution of “tenure” with the term “tenurial” is itself a shift away from academic jobs having ongoing permanence. Whereas tenure refers to “the right to permanent employment until retirement, esp (sic) for teachers, lecturers,” “tenurial” refers to “the fact, manner, or condition of holding something in one’s possession, as real estate or an office; occupation” (The Free Dictionary 2017). As borne out by successive sackings and forced redundancies at Australian universities, where staff have had no choice, “tenurial” captures the idea that tenure meaning permanence is a thing of the past. HE academics are increasingly vulnerable in environments where they have no comeback over increasing workloads and changes undermining work conditions, considered later in relation to how vulnerability interconnects with reticence to speak out for fear of reprisals.

These structural shifts have impacted upon academics in Australian universities resulting in loss of autonomy and declining work conditions under union-brokered enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs). Financial stringency is driving declining workplace standards, with increases in contract appointments based on individually negotiated agreements; decline of tenure protection of job security; and forced redundancies driven by funding shortfalls (often localized in particular schools and courses and lacking in transparency). There is a loss of autonomy over teaching, as enrollments drive curricula with large units dependent on cloud-delivered learning and large class sizes where there is face-to-face teaching. Courses or units with low enrollments and deemed uneconomical to offer result in redundancies or forced teaching transfers. The union (National Tertiary Education Union), focused on institutional EBAs, lacks clout to influence weakened outcomes in both EBA and individual cases.

The impact of C&C in Australia on academic and public-political roles of academic staff (taken to encompass academics of ranks level A lecturer to professor level E), and excluding adjunct, casual/sessional, and honorary roles, was captured in the 2007 Changing Academic Profession (CAP) survey with 1370 responses from academics from 20 Australian universities (and replicated in 20 countries) (Coates et al. 2009). The survey found that academic satisfaction was declining and that Australian academics were less satisfied with their work than their international colleagues. These authors summed up the demands placed on academics in Australia over a decade ago: “There has been considerable pressure placed on Australian academic staff to be more competitive, productive and accountable, while simultaneously being more entrepreneurial and innovative” (Coates et al. 2008: 183; see also Chap. 8 for a similar point). These results concur with other commentaries. Bexley’s research on Australian academics across 20 universities with 5525 responses (including limited term contract and sessional staff) found that “around half believe that their workload is not manageable, or that they experience high levels of stress related to their work” and that work design, workloads, and working conditions will be central to future renewal of quality teaching (Bexley et al. 2011: xiii). While academics listed the intellectual and scholarly aspects of their work as positives, they strongly expressed negatives including “excessive administrative duties, overbearing bureaucracy and lack of job security” (Bexley et al. 2011: 14).
Probert has noted how academic performance and workloads are being managed more invasively with some punitive outcomes. She cites a policy from one university’s Academic Workloads guidelines: “Staff who are not ‘research active’ as defined by the Division/School/Institute workload allocation model and following a reasonable opportunity to undertake research may be allocated additional teaching or other academic duties”; “teaching is being defined here as a sort of punishment for failure to meet personal research performance targets” (Probert 2015: 47; see also Chap. 7 for a similar point).

While academic freedom is nominally supported, it is being chipped away by worsening work conditions, increased academic workloads, and a divide-and-rule culture, as academics are scared of reprisals (e.g., imposition of heavier workloads) if they speak out or complain about work conditions. In terms of Lukes’s third dimension of power, the capacity for system-questioning criticism and the time for research are whittled away, in particular for teaching-intensive academics and casuals.

11.4.5 Impacts of Increased Reliance on International Student Fees

Marking the transition from elite to mass university education, enrollments in Australian public universities have increased from 956,515 in 2006 (Department of Education and Training 2007) to over 1.4 million Australian and international students in 2015 (Department of Education and Training 2015). Approximately 74% of students in 2015 were domestic and 26% were international (Robinson 2017: 29). Education is Australia’s highest service export and was worth A$20.3 billion to the Australian economy in 2015–16 (Robinson 2017: 29). Research from the Grattan Institute found that in 2013, overseas students paid $4.3 billion in fees to Australian universities, the bulk of the $6 billion total paid in fees. The institute warns that this leaves Australian universities vulnerable to any economic downturn in source countries like China (Norton and Cherastidtham 2015).

Government cuts to HE funding have propelled Australian universities into competition for international fee-paying students, predominantly from Asia and China in particular. The shift to a deregulated HE market has meant overall increases in funding in support of expanded enrollments but a decline in the proportion contributed by government funding and increased pressure on international student fee income (18% of university funding nationally in 2015), industry, and other funding sources (Robinson 2017: 35). Commenting on the government focus on HE as an export industry, “the cultural equivalent of iron ore,” Connell signals another shift where monetizing high fees for overseas students replaces “an earlier regime where Australian universities offered modest development aid to Southeast Asia for free” (Connell 2013: 1). Some HE leaders argue that opening up Australian HE to Asian students goes beyond revenue. Marginson, the vice chancellor of the University of
Melbourne, noted the high value put on self-funded education in Post-Confucian societies and the potential for ongoing culturally sensitive research partnerships and collaborations (Marginson 2015). This, however, is mainly interpreted across the HE sector as a steady flow of customers and a revenue flow upon which the sector is increasingly dependent.

Such dependence also exposes the sector to income-stream risks, illustrated by media reports of attacks on Indian students in 2008–2010 which resulted in reputational damage affecting enrollments (Bennett 2017). Meanwhile, there is scant discussion of the displacement effects of funds spent marketing for international students and the diversion of teaching funds to research (Hamilton 2018), or the favoring of disciplines or programs with greater appeal to international student markets, so as to maximize performance on international rankings linked to attracting students in a competitive commercialized international HE market. Risks of conflicts of interest increase as the academy is more beholden to commercial or government vested interests, for example, through sponsorships, donations, partnerships, benefactions, dedicated chairs, and institutes with corporations, which may also have foreign government links (Hamilton 2018).

11.4.6 Defense of Academic Freedom from Foreign Influence

Reliance on international student fee income has in the past focused on questions around shifting academic standards linked to accusations of dumbing down entry scores and English requirements, soft marking, and lowered student work standards linked to non-English-speaking fee-paying students. At the University of Newcastle (in New South Wales), a plagiarism scandal involving 15 international students studying offshore was covered up by senior management staff, and at another university an academic whistleblower was sacked and then reinstated after disclosing that he was instructed to upgrade international students’ honors marks (Corvini 2003). Other issues included controversies over TESL cutoffs (English competency test for university admission and assessment conditions/standards) for coursework postgraduate courses such as MBAs. International students have been implicated in cheating, plagiarism, and soft institutional responses to exam and essay cheating. A Fairfax report exposed use of the MyMaster service, marketed in both English and Chinese, by over one thousand New South Wales HE students to write essays and sit online tests (Visentin 2015). A report by the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC 2015), Learning the Hard Way, warned universities against creating conditions “conducive to corruption” and eroding academic standards. The report referred to “‘a widespread public perception that academic standards are lowered to accommodate a cohort of students who struggle to pass” (ICAC 2015: 4).

Following public safety concerns and assaults on international students, reductions in HE international student enrollments, “most particularly from India but also Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and other Asian nations,” were troubling to the
HE sector. Universities Australia (2012: 2) named factors that “combined to create the crisis including student safety concerns, private college closures, a strong Australian dollar and changed migration policy settings.” Vice chancellors noted the historic engagement with Asian education, with over one thousand Australian institutional programs in Asia. Prospects for deeper cultural engagement and research partnerships with Asia in a “third wave of internationalization” have been embraced by Universities Australia’s input to the Australian Government White Paper on The Asian Century (Universities Australia 2012). However, engaging with the Asian Century raises other intercultural issues. As Simon Marginson notes, “the post-Confucian states see higher education and research as essential to economic growth and global effectiveness,” but he argues, “concepts like state responsibility, civil society, public interest and academic freedom are practiced differently in much of East Asia” (Marginson 2015, 204, 207). As he explains, this requires culturally sensitive understanding, and “in the Chinese tradition, scholars have a responsibility to serve the state” (Marginson 2015: 208).

From the earlier discussion of C&C, it follows that the commercialization of exchange relationships between academic staff and tertiary education students (now high-paying consumers) results in qualitatively changed relationships, expectations, and accountabilities. Students (both domestic and international) have become consumers, and HE is a service mediated by commercial and implied contract relationships. Students are consumers invoking value-for-money claims against academic lecturers, including expectations that HE qualifications (even for undergraduate degrees) will result in jobs and enhanced incomes as illustrated by return-on-investment discourses. But layered upon this, pro-PRC course content is also becoming part of these claims by Chinese students (Hamilton 2018).

There are newly emerging concerns about Chinese government monitoring of international students on Australian campuses (Varrall 2017). An ABC Four Corners program on The Chinese Communist Party’s Power and Influence in Australia alleged the Chinese government has been monitoring students studying in Australia (McKenzie et al. 2017). The program reported that Swinburne University’s Professor Fitzgerald “has warned Communist Party influence operations in Australia not only risk dividing the Chinese community but sparking hostility between it and other Australians” (ABC News 2017). Former-DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) Chief Mr. Varghese argued that Australia should require more accountability and transparency around the way the Communist Party and its proxies are operating in the media and on university campuses. (ABC News 2017). In September–October 2017, this took a new turn, with Chinese students studying in Australia posting on Chinese websites videos critical of content used by some Australian university lecturers (e.g., citing Taiwan as a country and territory claimed by China as part of India) claimed to be insulting to China or incorrect (Ho 2017).

A proposal from the think tank “China Matters” argued that Australian universities should formally adopt a new code of conduct to resist what it sees as pressure from Chinese government officials to alter academic content (Gill and Jakobson 2017). Following these high-profile media discussions of untoward Chinese influence, Secretary to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia’s...
highest-ranking diplomat, Frances Adamson, gained wide media attention for her strident defense of Australian HE freedom of speech. In an address to the University of Adelaide Confucius Institute in October 2017, she said universities should be prepared to “remain true” to their values and to “remain secure and resilient.” She urged students to speak up. “We have seen attempts at untoward influence and interference.” “When confronted with awkward choices, it is up to us to choose our response, whether to make an uncomfortable compromise or decide instead to remain true to our values, ‘immune from intolerance or external influence’ as Adelaide University’s founders envisaged” (Adamson 2017).

With 525 Confucius Institutes and 1113 Confucius Classrooms across 146 countries and regions, Australia ranks third behind the number in the USA and UK. Confucius Institutes have become controversial in Australia because of their potential to “compromise academic freedom, spread propaganda, encourage self-censorship on sensitive issues and exert undue influence on schools, universities and governments” and because some overseas universities have closed their institutes or refused such offers (Gill 2018). There are concerns in New South Wales that the Confucius Institute is located within the government bureaucracy, with positions and operating budget funded by the government Department of Education and that Hanban (the Chinese government Office of Chinese Language Council International) “provided establishment funds of A$150,000 for the Confucius Institute, as well as A$10,000 for every Confucius Classroom” (Gill 2018).

As argued earlier, Australia has a legal/institutional framework supportive of freedom of expression and opinion. As Secretary to DFAT, Frances Adamson, stated in late 2017:

Australia is a pluralistic society: a place where open debate, individual rights and freedoms are the foundation upon which we have built our political and economic systems. We are a society that thrives on the competition of ideas.

Australia’s university campuses have a proud history of supporting free debate – of enabling the robust exchange of viewpoints. Universities don’t just give students qualifications, but prepare citizens capable of participating fully in political, social and economic life. The silencing of anyone in our society – from students to lecturers to politicians – is an affront to our values. Enforced silence runs counter to academic freedom. It is only by discussion, and of course discussion which is courteous, that falsehoods can be corrected.

Respectful and patient discourse with those with whom you disagree is a fundamental skill for our ever-more-connected contemporary world (Adamson 2017).

These issues stretch beyond Australia. Cambridge University Press censored more than 300 online access articles in its journal *The China Quarterly* (Pringle 2018) and later relented following fierce protest internationally. Springer Nature “blocked access on its Chinese website to more than 1,000 academic articles containing key terms such as ‘Tibet,’ ‘Taiwan,’ or ‘Hong Kong,’ which China deems politically sensitive” (Zhang 2018). In November 2017, Allen & Unwin suspended publication of Australian academic Clive Hamilton’s book, *Silent Invasion: How China is Turning Australia into a Puppet State*, after “extensive legal advice” over the possibility of defamation action (Hamilton 2018). The book was subsequently published by another publisher.
There are claims by the Director of the East Asia Program at the Lowy Institute, Merriden Varrall:

Universities have not adequately addressed this threat to debate and openness. Officials may be reluctant to take action because overseas students bring a lot of money to under-funded Australian universities (Varrall 2017).

Problems have also been raised when funding bodies seek to interfere in governance where universities have traditionally been autonomous. A proposal from the philanthropic Ramsay Institute for an AUD$3 billion bequest to Australian National University for a Centre of Western Civilization sparked controversy when Ramsay Center board member, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, wrote in the conservative periodical Quadrant in May 2018 that the Ramsay charity would wield some control over staffing and curriculum decisions in the new center.

Subsequently, ANU withdrew from the proposal, citing “no prospect of us reaching agreement,” and the Vice Chancellor Brian Schmidt reiterated the principles of “integrity, autonomy and freedom” underlying this decision (Schmidt 2018). Commenting on the ensuing hub-bub in the Australian newspaper, Robert Manne commented, “no university worthy of the name could accept a gift from a benefactor who did not trust the beneficiary, who wanted therefore to micromanage its implementation, and who had shown during discussions that it respected neither the autonomy of the university nor the idea of academic freedom” (Manne 2018).

Subsequently the Ramsay Centre found a home at the University of Wollongong, also controversial, as the decision by-passed the university Senate, and two other universities are considering the funding.

11.5 Conclusion

Under increasing financial stress, vice chancellors, likened to CEOs of large private firms and with equivalent budgets, seek to augment decreased national government funding from more diversified sources: principally from international student fees, research income, and corporate sponsorships, along with their profit-making entities that commercialize patented inventions. Academics are expected to do more with less funding.

This chapter has argued that the academic workforce in Australia is concentrated into a core of precarious “continuing” (rather than protected tenured) staff, as increasingly, tenure recedes and two-thirds of the university workforce comprises increasingly marginalized, casualized staff. With the new forms of self-censorship or just the sheer load of balancing work, life, teaching and publications, grants, and metrics’ performativity, the net effect is disabling academic capacity to exercise academic freedom of expression and work-based autonomy. Under the C&C neoliberal reform agenda, “hard liberalism” has impacted on the academy, depleting capacity for the exercise of academic freedom and autonomy and the pursuit of “free intellectual inquiry” (Norton and Cakitaki 2016, 10). This may play out
unequally. Research-funded institutes can continue to support academic freedom and work conditions conducive to intellectually driven research. But universities less successful in winning competitive national research funding and funding biases against the humanities and social sciences may stunt research, and academic research may become increasingly tailored to donor needs or to government political agendas.

Declining teaching and assessment standards become a vexed issue for underachieving domestic students (admitted with low high school HE-enter scores) and for international students from non-English-speaking countries admitted to courses without the required language skills and background to cope with knowledge-based critical pedagogy. For academic staff, increased insecurity of academic tenure under institutional governance by highly paid contracted senior executive staff with far-reaching powers to impact day-to-day academic work conditions contributes to lowered morale, heightened perceptions of insecurity, and self-censorship among the academic rank and file (Coates et al. 2009; Connell 2016; Fraser and Taylor 2016). As Fraser and Taylor (2016: 1) note, “the power/knowledge paradigm of neoliberalism has begun to dismantle the idea of a public intellectual.” This takes place in the context of frequent budget-driven redundancies within the sector over the last decade, as a shadow hanging over those who underperform or step out of line.

Although some government officials seem to understand the risks to academic freedom, government policies in general are not helping. The commercialization and commodification post-1980s Australian HE reforms under neoliberal reform agendas have transferred priority from HE as a public good coupled to individual benefit to individualized social capital (Savage 2011), resulting in some of the highest degree fees in developed countries. As the Australian economy opened to the global market from the 1990s, HE has been framed as a private good (and responsibility) and secondarily for national benefit. This shift has been central to the retreat of government from funding HE and the rise in consumer/user (student) payments, linked to other shifts in governance and a whittling away of academic freedom and autonomy including, taking Lukes’s third dimension of power, the will and capacity to exert it.

Cross-cutting themes on HE C&C and the neoliberal reform agenda have rendered Australian HE an individual investment, accompanied by increased individualization of risk, cost, and benefit. Far from investing in youth, Australian graduates enter the workforce with growing fee-related personal debt. These are hallmarks of a neoliberal reform agenda, linked to C&C across the Australian economy from the 1980s but worsened by massification of higher education at the same time as funding cuts per student.

Australia is linked to Asian contributions in this volume not only geographically as regional neighbors but through Australian HE dependence on Asian international students (the largest group from China). As Clive Hamilton argued:

Although they deny it, the money that pours into Australian universities from China has an insidious silencing effect (Hamilton 2018).
Income from international students has now surpassed tourism in terms of percentage of Australia’s GDP and is third in line behind coal and iron ore in terms of exports (Thirlwell 2018). C&C coupled with ongoing budget cuts to HE have rendered the sector increasingly dependent on nongovernment funding, principally from international students, alongside patented inventions and corporate sponsorships. These can enmesh universities in complex conflicts of interest that undermine academic freedom to speak out critically against political regimes, funding partners, or whole industrial sectors enmeshed in university-funded research (e.g., banks, the coal industry, mining, tobacco, gambling, or the pharmaceutical industry). The impacts are both diverse and far-reaching.

Controversially, new forms of commodification, funding diversion, and priority shifting come with this increased reliance on external nongovernment income. The over-reliance on international student fee income in the Australian HE sector partly as a means of replacing cuts to national government funding, became brutally evident in early 2020, as COVID-19 travel restrictions exposed the vulnerability of the sector to this dramatic loss of income. Perversely, there is the added complexity that reliance on international fee-paying student income has resulted in cost-shifting to research rather than teaching, since international university leagues tables are based on research performance (Hamilton 2018). Such reliance is also coupled to public debates on foreign influence and freedom of the academy but with affirmation of academic freedom by Australian vice chancellors and high-ranking government officials.

In 2018 the government commissioned an independent review into freedom of speech in higher education by former High Court of Australia Chief Judge the Hon. Robert French. It has recommended universities adopt their own versions of a voluntary code of practice outlined in the report, with umbrella principles embedded to promote and protect freedom of expression and intellectual inquiry. The review concludes that “existing legislative and statutory standards are pitched at a level of generality which allows for choice in how their requirements are met. Allowing universities to institute their own versions they argue is in itself respectful of institutional autonomy ‘which is a dimension of academic freedom’” (French 2019). Transposed upon these changing relationships within the academy are newly emerging pressures from foreign influences pressing their political agendas. The challenge for the Australian university sector (especially faculty and management), publishers, and political leaders will be to draw a line defending academic autonomy and freedom of speech.
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