Welcome to the August edition of the Go8 Newsletter

As always, the newsletter has a diverse list of contributions, including our regular and enjoyable look at members’ research. Our main feature is an early interview with Hon Greg Hunt, our new Federal Minister for Industry Innovation and Science. This is a portfolio vital to the Go8 as Australia’s group of leading research intensive universities.

Minister Hunt is certainly excited by the new portfolio and is eminently qualified. Within days he had changed the Government’s messaging about the value of innovation to every Australian, and makes the point that innovation will be responsible for 60% of Australia’s productivity… so having the community embrace it is vital.

University of Adelaide Vice Chancellor Professor Warren Bebbington expands (with thanks to Campus Review) on the value of financial assistance to worthy students so they can chase their dream. This follows on from his contribution last newsletter on how he himself was able to attend University. Again this is at times an emotional read and it makes so much sense. We hope it gives the Government food for thought.

Also contributing is University of Melbourne academic Nicholas Reece (A Sky and Fairfax regular for political tragics). Nicholas explains why the sector should not hold its breath waiting for major reform to higher education regardless of the fact it is so essential to the sector’s future. That said, he also makes the point that there is much to be positive about.

The Directorate has been busy. In the lead up to Australia’s Federal election on 2 July, the Group of Eight (Go8) Board took a conscious decision to go public in its “Priority Directions” for an incoming government. Priority Directions tackled the five main issues Government must act on. Our number one issue is of course the distorted funding model which must be corrected. The sector has reached a tipping point after years of either policy inertia or funding cuts. Equity is also key. Too few low SES students are entering the nation’s universities. That too must be corrected. Priority Directions also tackled the sector’s elephant in the room – the demand driven system (DDS).

Since the election, which as we all know returned a Turnbull Coalition Government with the much-reduced majority of just one seat; and as we have had to stare down a further two months without Parliament or political momentum, the Go8 has continued with this very deliberate, and equally essential, advocacy set out in Priority Directions.

The Go8 believes there is now the opportunity to enhance the DDS by moving to a new model with a fresh purpose – one that better drives opportunity, student choice and diversity across all tertiary education...
In a recent speech to a Graduate and Employability Partnerships Forum, I spoke about some of the unintended consequences of the DDS including the fact that while undergraduate degree participation has grown substantially, important sub-degree programs in vocational education and higher education have languished.

While early media labelled the speech as provocative, yet again almost all the coverage and public responses were positive. We look forward to advancing this subject as a priority in Canberra.

Past weeks however have not been all about the DDS. The Go8 has been promoting its defence sector capacity. Go8 universities lead the nation in defence partnerships and capabilities and with the nation’s highest levels of defence and security clearance.

That we cannot speak publicly about most of what we do in this area led to the redacted design of an advertisement published in “The Australian”. It’s a very clever manifestation of the strength of the Go8’s work in the defence space… and no we definitely can’t share!
“The sting in the tail is that he can smell bullsh-t at a thousand paces and he will have jumped to the end of your brief with in-depth questions before you are halfway through…”

Australia has a new Industry Innovation and Science Minister. For the Go8, as Australia’s leading group of Universities, and also the nation’s leading research intensive universities, it is a key portfolio. The right Minister is imperative.

The Hon Greg Hunt MP, 50, is a University of Melbourne alumni with first class honours in Law. He delivered the best final year thesis in Law and he has an honours in Arts also. He always stresses how important his university years were to him and while there he was Australian Universities debating champion and then runner up at the World Universities Debating Championships.

He was associate to the Chief Justice of the Federal Court, and a Fulbright scholar (Yale where he obtained an MA in International Relations). He is ex McKinsey, which awakened his interest in all things innovative, and led to a secondment in Geneva as Director of Strategy at the World Economic Forum.

He is a start-up entrepreneur, (a foundation investor in Aconex the world’s leading business construction software) and an ex Alexander Downer staffer (when he was Opposition Leader and Minister of Foreign Affairs). He also grew up with politics, the son of one of Victoria’s most respected Liberal State politicians, the late Alan Hunt.

He is a softly-softly determined retail politician who, as Environment and Climate Change Minister, against all odds took climate change off the nation’s front pages. He also delivered a Renewable Energy Target (RET) structure that made warring parties sign off – including his own party (many of whom wanted no RET), the Labor Opposition, and the renewable energy sector. Others may have claimed the media
credit but Hunt’s team, Cabinet and the Opposition knew who actually brokered the deal.

Then there was his very quiet overseas trip where he managed to convince UNESCO to remove the Great Barrier Reef from its World Heritage environmental ‘watch list’. Earlier this year his climate change policy portfolio management led to the World Bank and the OECD awarding him their inaugural Best Minister in the World award.

It all paints a picture of a politician determined to find his way through issues and on to solutions. For the Go8 it is important this is, and remains Hunt’s raison d’etre. Innovation and its successes are at the core of what the Go8 is, and what it represents.

The Go8 carries out research worth $6 billion each year, $2.5 billion of which is Government funded. It receives 66 per cent of all research funding from industry to universities, which is twice that of the rest of the sector combined. It is an active participant in 82 per cent of Australia’s Cooperative Research Centres. It creates 80 per cent of the sector’s commercialisation income and delivers 62 per cent of the sector’s start-ups.

A senior public servant who had numerous dealings with Hunt during the climate change policy debate says Universities have won a lottery with Hunt albeit one that comes with a sting in the tail. “He is a really serious policy wonk who craves good public policy and with a fierce intellect,” he said. “He will live and breathe innovation and science for you. It suits his brain and he genuinely is stimulated by dealings with academics and universities in general, and he has had massive exposure to the entrails of every area of the business community from agriculture and mining to finance, telecommunications and manufacturing through managing carbon policy issues. He knows how it all ticks. That makes it easy for you. That’s your lottery win.”

“The sting in the tail is that he can smell bullish-t at a thousand paces and he will have jumped to the end of your brief with in-depth questions before you are halfway through – so go prepared or else, and with policy solutions to present, not your hands out that’s the sting in the tail. He has no time for rent seekers so never confuse his interest in a topic for agreement of demands.”

None of this is new to anyone who has dealt with Hunt and his team. A gentle front disguises an intolerance of spin, and longwinded discourse. Many have left meetings with him feeling they have been carefully and precisely filleted.

It seems Hunt would agree with most of that analysis of how he operates, just as he knows it is going to take all of his retail political skills to have the Australian community stop fearing innovation and embrace it as an essential part of everyday life. The recent election campaign saw innovation move from the Government’s key message to a pejorative term that poll indicators turned off large swathes of the electorate as frightening and too abstract.

Asked if he considers this daunting, Hunt sounds bemused by the question. “I find the portfolio especially exciting,” says the Minister. “I very carefully chose my first two visits in the new portfolio so people could see what the Government is about when it talks innovation and so they can understand my message; what I am saying about innovation. It’s about creating jobs, thinking ahead. We have to do that, and we have to convince people it makes sense to them as individuals.”

“For that reason I went to Questacon, the National Science and Technology Centre with its emphasis on science and the future – which I love and will focus on, and then to Dulux – a 100 year old paint company that has tripled its market capitalisation in six years using innovation and brand awareness. If you are going to build a new $165 million manufacturing plant then you have to be innovative to have the best processes to make that investment work for you. Dulux has done that. That saves jobs and creates jobs.”

Hunt has already honed his key message. It is being aired at every opportunity, and the community and the Go8 are going to be hearing it constantly – that ‘the industry portfolio is about current jobs, innovation is about emerging jobs and science is about future jobs’.

“As a Government we have to help encourage investment,” he says. “And innovation is about far more than start-ups. Yes we want start-ups. I have been a part of that with Aconex (which is now worth $1.5 billion but which he had to divest his interest in on becoming a Minister).

“It is very exciting and important for Australia to encourage and create the right investment climate, to have universities that drive a start-up culture, but we want what Dulux has done too and that also involves universities. We put a value on that. Existing businesses innovating to ensure they keep jobs and can deliver future jobs is especially relevant, and that is what the community needs to hear. This is about ensuring there are jobs, it’s not about taking them away.”

It is no secret in Canberra that Hunt has inherited a portfolio that has a bare funding cupboard. While he may be especially committed to industry innovation and science, the reality is he is facing a loaves and fishes agenda. That politics is the art of the possible has never sounded more apt.

Although as a new Prime Minister last year, Malcolm Turnbull talked long and loud about the excitement of innovation it has become obvious that it was a moment in time, one not backed in with additional funding to smooth its delivery or increase its momentum.

Minister Hunt is already on record as saying innovation has to be the driver of 60 per cent of Australia’s productivity. He knows what is needed to make that eventuate. Now he has to make it happen.
No education without aspiration

Professor Warren Bebbington
Vice Chancellor, University of Adelaide

We implant aspiration for university study in the minds of children, many from backgrounds of chronic unemployment and lack of education.

A world of higher learning and opportunities can be found on university campuses, but disadvantaged students often must see it to desire it.

When I was 11 years old, I went with a church boys’ club to visit Melbourne University. We raced around the campus, past imposing scientific laboratories and through the historic cloisters. We swam in the Beaurepaire Pool, and had a snack in the Union House among the undergrads.

Those were the days of the Space Race and the Cuban Missile Crisis; the campus was dotted with lab-coated young students who to my child mind seemed intent on putting a man on the moon. We overheard conversations for and against communism, god’s existence, and more. The atmosphere seemed to quietly embrace some higher purpose. As a child from a labourer’s family with no background of university study, it made an indelible impression on me, and sowed in my mind the first seed of awareness of what a university symbolised.

It may seem curious that the guide for my first visit to a university campus was a church boys’ club leader. But in those days, it would not have occurred to the public primary school I attended that excursions to a university had much value for a group of low-income students, most of whom were not expected to be at school longer than the age of 16. Were it not for the enterprising zeal of that university-educated club leader, this little adventure would not have come to pass. Back then, only 6 per cent of school students went on to university, there was little point exposing the mass of them to it.

But the child is father of the man, as Wordsworth wrote. Wise educators today know that childhood forms the adult, and the pathway to success in tertiary education begins in primary school, where the seeds of aspiration for university study can be sown. While many young people have these seeds sown by the example of graduate parents, many in disadvantaged families do not.

The Commonwealth’s Higher Education Participation and Pathways Program (HEPPP) was established with generating such aspirations in mind. The idea was to help universities design strategies to improve access for students with low-socioeconomic status, and to enhance their retention and completion once they get there.

At the University of Adelaide in 2013, we were fortunate to win one of the largest grants in the HEPPP scheme, for our multi-year Journey to Higher Education project, through which, in co-operation with the state education authorities and other universities, activities are now conducted in some of the most disadvantaged primary schools in our city. We implant aspiration for university study in the minds of children, many from backgrounds of chronic unemployment and lack of education. Later, in disadvantaged secondary schools, we assist them with preparation for university admission. Once they are at university, we offer support to improve their retention in our degree programs.

It may seem puzzling that the University of Adelaide, one of the oldest of Australia’s sandstone universities, would be at the forefront of the HEPPP grant recipient list and a leading promoter of outreach to low-SES schools. But since its beginning in 1874, U of A has been committed to access for students of ability, regardless of their economic circumstances. Our founder, Dr Augustus Short, was determined to create something different from the playground for male aristocrats he recalled from his days as an Oxford don. At Adelaide, he admitted women as full students – the first university in Australia to do so and only the second in the English-speaking world – and from the outset, he offered scholarships to make university attainable even to the most deprived young people of the colony. It is a tradition we have sought over the past four years to recapture.

Undoubtedly, the most impressive part of our HEPPP activities is the Children’s University, also known as CU. This is a UK-originated program that takes children aged 7–14 from the most disadvantaged schools, brings them onto campus, gives them small study tasks and extracurricular experiences that they log in a CU passport, and then confers a certificate on them. This presentation takes place at a gala CU graduation ceremony on campus, complete with academic procession – the children in mini-academic gowns and mortar boards.
Through this program, Adelaide is now reaching 4600 children a year from deprived schools in the state. The effect of a taste of university on their families, which range from Somalian refugees to third-generation welfare dependents who have never been near a university, has been profound.

U of A holds the Australian franchise for CU, through which we are now developing branches in other universities, from Newcastle to Darwin. We expect soon to see CU in New Zealand as well.

Sadly, our work may soon need to wind down. In the May federal Budget, the Commonwealth announced that the HEPPP scheme that funds these projects will be wound down to half its size over the coming three years. Large programs like ours will inevitably lose their funding, or have it significantly reduced.

This was a difficult decision to understand. A major aim of the demand-driven system (DDS) was to lift the participation of the disadvantaged in university study to 20 per cent of national enrolments. But the system has failed to improve low-SES enrolments in universities by much: the increase has been just 1.7 per cent. The assumption was that simply removing enrolment limits in universities would draw in disadvantaged students. Clearly, more than this is required to interest, prepare, attract and, most importantly, retain the disadvantaged in a university. The HEPPP grants have been a more active and effective way of achieving this objective, and against the billions being consumed by the DDS, have done so at insignificant cost.

When I was 11, university students still wore black gowns on campus – a quaint spectacle that contributed to the indelible impression my visit to Melbourne University made on me. Today, we would hope that our campuses wouldn’t make so otherworldly an impression on visitors. But they remain an unquestionably powerful symbol of discovery and advanced learning at work, and certainly no institutions were ever so important to our nation’s economic future. They should be places where able students can always enter and succeed, whatever their economic circumstances. With the future of university funding far from settled, we can only hope that wiser minds prevail, and that the proposed cuts to HEPPP are abandoned.

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Ancient garden transformed for Monash European centre

The garden will be a space at the heart – both literally and figuratively – of the Prato Centre’s life.

The Monash Prato Centre garden in Italy is not simply a serene space for students to study and absorb the rich culture of their surroundings. The garden’s elegant, yet simplistic design respectfully and creatively pays tribute to the area’s history.

A generous donation of EUR 50,000 by Prato Centre Patron Dr Carla Zampatti enabled this beautiful garden (officially opened at the start of the European summer) to be recreated by one of Australia’s most renowned landscape designers, Paul Bangay.

History had forgotten the garden at Palazzo Vai. Six hundred years ago it conformed to the strict yet serene ideal of classical Italian plantings. In World War II it was given over to practical, rather than aesthetic purposes, and cultivated for food. And by the time Monash University began using the Palazzo and its 18th-century extension for its European base, the garden had been replaced by a gravel carpark.

An echo of the old garden remained, however. The discovery in the 1960s of 15th-century wall frescos – graffiti of court life and cavorting May Day revelers, now held in Prato’s San Domenico Museo di Pittura Murale – sparked the imagination of Prato Centre director Cecilia Hewlett. She suggested reinstating the garden’s tranquil beauty to visiting Patron of the Prato Centre, Dr Carla Zampatti, who was immediately enthusiastic.

The confluence of like minds extended further. Not only did Dr Zampatti’s generous donation make the project possible; so too did Australia’s most celebrated landscape designer Paul Bangay. Noted for his restrained, ordered gardens grounded in a palpable love of classical principles, Paul was the obvious person to approach.

“They came and said, would you like to help us? Of course I jumped at it,” he says. He then eagerly donated his time and expertise.

Of the 21st century Prato garden which is a sizeable 657 square metres, Paul says “It’s an Italian style garden with an Australian slant. It’s not a pastiche version of an Italian garden.”

His design finds the beauty and elegance in simplicity. A limited palette includes Magnolia grandiflora clipped into a traditional cone shape standing sentry around the edges, while box hedges, star jasmine and pots of citrus pay symmetrical homage to a central fountain.

As the famous native of nearby Florence, Dante Alighieri was well aware, taming nature into ordered beauty can evoke intimations of the divine – or, for those not of a religious bent, the nobility and resilience of the human spirit. Whether in Italy or Australia, the 15th century or the modern age, a well-tended garden is a place of respite, solace and joy.

The garden will be a space at the heart – both literally and figuratively – of the Prato Centre’s life. Not only will it be an eminently useful space for students to relax and study, it will be used by researchers, conference delegates and other visitors.

The Italians call them the polmone verde della città: the green lungs of the city. Perhaps most importantly of all, the garden will be open to the citizens of Prato to enjoy on special occasions.

“It goes to our ability to engage with the city,” says Dr Hewlett. “Traditionally these towns have little in terms of green space. The garden is a way of giving back to the city that has been so welcoming of Monash.”

Dr Zampatti agrees. “Prato has been so accommodating to Monash and made the students feel so welcome. It’s a wonderful gift for the citizens of Prato.”
**New global partnership opportunity an Australian first**

*Cook Medical Australia, a privately owned medical device manufacturer, will join UIDP as UQ’s industry partner.*

The University of Queensland has become the first Australian institution to be invited to join an exclusive international organisation focused on driving partnerships between universities and industry.

It is one of only a select number of universities outside of the US to join the membership-based University-Industry Demonstration Partnership (UIDP) this year.

The organisation currently boasts more than 130 member companies and universities.

UIDP President Dr Anthony Boccanfuso said that until recently, UIDP’s membership consisted only of US-based companies and universities.

“The UIDP recognises that our members have a global focus, and we need to benchmark what is being done in other parts of the world. UQ was considered the best university in Australia to benchmark against,” Dr Boccanfuso said.

UQ’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Professor Robyn Ward said engaging with UIDP and its members would provide new perspectives to industry collaboration.

“UIDP membership presents a great opportunity for UQ to engage with our counterparts in universities and industry and to explore new approaches to fostering our partnerships,” she said.

“It also gives us the opportunity to showcase UQ’s initiatives that recognise university-industry collaboration, including the UQ Partners in Research Excellence Awards.”

Under the terms of UIDP membership, universities are required to nominate an industry partner.

Cook Medical Australia, a privately owned medical device manufacturer, will join UIDP as UQ’s industry partner.

Director for Cook Medical Asia Pacific Mr Barry Thomas said the membership would strengthen existing relationships and facilitate new connections.

“Our objectives through this membership are to explore new opportunities to engage with UQ and to generate relationships with other UIDP universities across the Asia Pacific,” Mr Thomas said.

The membership will be managed on behalf of UQ by UniQuest, UQ’s main commercialisation company.

UniQuest CEO Dr Dean Moss said UQ’s involvement with UIDP was a welcome opportunity.

“UQ has a strong track record in engaging with companies and building productive, progressive relationships with industry,” he said.

“Given the current focus on university-industry collaboration, prompted by the National Innovation and Science Agenda, this partnership will give us access to an invaluable forum for sharing best practice in industry engagement and for finding new ways to bring UQ’s exciting discoveries and technologies to the world.”
Expect no direction from Canberra gridlock

Nicholas Reece – principal fellow at the Melbourne School of Government, University of Melbourne

Don’t hold your breath waiting for major reform to higher education from the re-elected Turnbull Government. The July election has left Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the Coalition with a parliament that will be hard to muster and a government without a clear policy mandate. The election result has also shifted the “conventional Canberra wisdom” in a way that is not helpful for the university sector.

That said, there are opportunities for some incremental government policy changes that can still amount to real progress. More significantly, not all policy making is government dependent. And beyond Canberra there are huge opportunities for the higher education sector to tackle its own challenges and those of broader society.

But let’s start with the Canberra gridlock. Parliamentary politics is ultimately a numbers game and navigating the passage of contentious legislation through the 45th Parliament will be diabolically difficult. In the 76 seat Senate the situation is even more fraught with the Coalition holding 30 seats, Labor 25 seats and the cross bench a record 20 seats made up Greens 9, One Nation 4, Nick Xenophon Team 3, plus Jacqui Lambie, Derryn Hinch, David Leyonhjelm and Family First’s Bob Day.

This means the government will need the support of 9 out of 11 cross bench Senators to pass legislation if it is opposed by Labor and the Greens. They needed six out of eight in the previous parliament. If the 44th parliament is anything to go by then finding these votes amongst the myriad of egos, attention seekers, competing interests and priorities will be nigh on impossible.

The next challenge for the higher education sector is the way conventional wisdom has settled on certain issues following the election. The first is that the Abbott Government’s proposal for higher education fee deregulation, and the “$100,000 degrees” campaign against it, was one of the key policy areas that led to the demise of the government. This is a remarkable thing given the relatively low ranking that higher education is given in the usual political fray.

It has meant that under Malcolm Turnbull the proposal has been all but dropped and the Coalition and Labor remain highly sensitised to any claims about the impact of fee reform on education costs and equity claims. No reforms can now succeed unless they pass this test.

The second conventional wisdom that has taken hold in the political class is that “innovation” is not a vote winner, in fact it dearly cost the Coalition votes in the July election.

The logic goes that while Mr Turnbull was talking about an exciting, nimble, agile and innovation driven future he badly missed voter concerns about job security. Far from being exciting, many people see innovation and technological disruption as simply not relevant to their day to day concerns or as something that could negatively impact on their livelihood.

The Prime Ministers emphasis on the “Ideas Boom” to replace the fading “Mining Boom” has an obvious link to higher education and research featuring more prominently in policy making. The worry now is that a chastened PM will drop the agenda – rather than refashion it to highlight the importance of inclusive growth and the practical human benefits that a knowledge economy can deliver.

So what is to be done?

Minister Simon Birmingham is understandably cautious on fee deregulation and will not be leaping into any changes to the demand drive system. But he does want to engage the sector and has an understanding of the policy detail that will hopefully mean he can formulate reforms that are more cleverly crafted than the ham-fisted fee deregulation proposal of 2014. Labor’s new education ministerial line up of Tanya Plibersek (Education) and Terri Butler (Shadow Assistant

This means that the Government will not be able to pass legislation if just one of its members crosses the floor and Opposition and cross benchers vote against it.
The reality is that the solution to most of the big issues facing Australian universities rests with universities themselves, not government.

Minister for Universities) represent generational change for Labor. While Butler is untested she is open to new ideas and is considered one of the great hopes of Labor’s next generation of leaders.

Neither side of politics is going to give up on regulated pricing for undergraduate degrees in this term of parliament. So the focus should shift to finding ways to create headroom in the system that gives more autonomy to universities while providing assurances around cost and equity considerations. It remains to be seen how the new “Flagship courses” proposal will pass this hurdle. Similar equity concerns will also need to be satisfied in order for any changes to the HECS-HELP arrangements. The process that led to the deregulation of electricity prices in the 2000s, a reform that was supported by Labor State Governments, should provide some guidance.

The campaign for transparency to uncover the real cost structures in the sector also carries the promise of a more rational set of funding arrangements. But it also carries the risk that a disaggregated cost structure allows future governments to prioritise public funding to those parts of the sector that it sees as more important, which is likely to be teaching over research.

The reality is that the solution to most of the big issues facing Australian universities rests with universities themselves, not government. Rather than obsessing about the Canberra gridlock the university sector should be working on policy challenges it can solve largely on its own. Like developing deeper and more valuable links with industry and driving the innovation economy, reforming university workforce structures, building global links to other world leading universities, and better managing the increasingly complex transition that graduates go through from university to the workforce.

There is much to be positive about. After all, the Go8 universities are some of the most successful organisations in Australia precisely because they have been able to respond to these sorts of challenges in the past. They established policy directions for themselves, and got out there and grasped the opportunities of globalisation and the knowledge economy.
From all walks of life.

Go8 as an enormous... if they can be, and the future, because they are absolute.

Universities, those teaching and research, concentrates solely on... 2015 dealing with... The Go8 enters... at the University... have a quality outcome... Universities.

At other Australian... in terms of retention... continue to provide... support and education... vehement that the... delivers Australia's learning. That quality... group of Australian... other Australian... They benefited from... provided Australia... In 2013, the Go8... quality teaching and... being able to continue... concentrates solely on... fees and student... ask of Canberra's... that everything we... Go8 is certain of is... point, but what the... Universities we are... come from dedication... impact is... income of $2.4 billion.

In theory.

Sadly there remains... political consensus on... numbers – there is no... largely as a result... While there is... of what 2015 brings... informed each month... I will keep you... do our politicians.

Early Childhood... childcare... 011

Macca roaming... small trough. Facebook page, to his very own... OF TEACHING

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