

Big Picture
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Welcome to the new Semester!

And, of course, welcome to a new era in Federal politics, and therefore in university policy.

Adjusting to a new Government is never easy. Interpreting pre-election rhetoric and post-election pronouncements is something of an art form. Two ministers in the same policy space makes it even trickier. Julia Gillard (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations, Education and Social Inclusion) and Kim Carr (Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research) will provide the policy touch-stones, develop priorities that are both nationally relevant and politically adroit and, hopefully, work closely together to provide an integrated overview that invigorates the Australian university sector.

There are clues to Minister Gillard's broad agenda. Productivity is the key. The Minister will see a market driven, open and global economy (albeit regulated to ensure a fair-go) as the driver of wealth creation and redistribution.

Fair enough! Productivity provides an ideologically acceptable and highly effective economic driver. It clearly demonstrates the intersection between education, employment, the workplace and social inclusion.

Building workforce skills and capacity are necessary components of increasing per capita income and national growth. A productive society is well educated, enterprising and inclusive. The question for the universities is how to ensure the sector aligns with this model without sacrificing our equally important quest for excellence and diversity.

We need to convince Minister Gillard, if indeed she needs convincing, that the economy requires a major boost at the advanced-knowledge end of the spectrum. Skills development is not simply answering the vocational short falls of the present but producing the talent that will transform the very nature of our economy and of work itself.

Productivity is not simply about advancing workforce skills. It demands ideas, intellectual capital, advanced technologies and elaborately manufactured products and high level services. That means Australia must be invest in research, and be a global hub of creativity and discovery, of blue sky thinking as well as problem solving. If we choose our areas for research concentration well, we can be global leaders, not followers.

These are the challenges for the Government and for the university sector. UTAS will be working both with the sector and as an individual university to provide ideas, comment, advice and encouragement to ensure the Education Revolution has a real impact on the university sector.

I encourage you to engage in the debate, whether as members of professional bodies, as academics with particular expertise, or as active members of the community. Now is the time to get our voices heard while policy is being formulated and there is enthusiasm in Canberra to listen.

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