

## **“Just a knowledge worker? Academics, universities and industrial relations”**

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### *Abstract*

Industrial relations in universities in Australia bear the trappings, rhetoric and regulation of collective arrangements between any group of workers and their managers. And yet, universities carry forward institutional cultures in which academics are not like any other worker and indeed not like many of the other workers in their universities. They are analogous to professionals exercising considerable autonomy and decision-making power within their employment. Unlike most of the non-academic professionals with whom they work in universities, they have greater involvement in the governance and direction of the universities that employ them.

This lecture explores the way industrial relations in universities has been shaped to reconcile the tensions between the collectivisation of employment arrangements for academics in Australian universities and the institutional culture and context that supports the intellectual and organisational autonomy of an independent professional. Finally the lecture asks is industrial relations in universities ensuring ‘good careers’ and ‘good jobs’ for academics.

In Australia in the 1980s the industrial relations of universities changed profoundly. All university staff have been reminded of university industrial relations when enterprise agreements are renegotiated, usually every three years. More regularly than that, those responsible for academic staffing decisions in our universities, such as Deans and Heads of School, are reminded of the industrial regulatory framework in which their decisions are made.

Orwell de Foenander, in whose name this lecture is given, devoted his academic life to writing and teaching about Australia's system of industrial regulation. He wrote principally about the unique Australian system of conciliation and arbitration, while dreaming of a day when collective bargaining would provide what he believed would be a more free, flexible and responsible way to regulate relations between employers and employees. His life as an academic was undertaken well before the changes that came to universities in the 1980s, and before the collective negotiation of university enterprise agreements became commonplace. His experience as an academic was in a system that had no experience of collective bargaining, and was also outside the collective industrial relations system of the time.

In this lecture I explore how and how much the current system of collective industrial relations matters to the employment and work of academics. Academics are chosen because of the central significance of their work to the way the university operates.

When Foenander was an academic, the accepted definition of a university was of 'a corporation of teachers or assemblage of colleges for teaching the higher branches of learning, and having power to confer degrees' (Masterman, 1952:55). If you check Wikipedia today, you will get a similar definition and the addition that '[t]he word university is derived from the Latin *universitas magistrarum et scholarium*, which roughly means "community of teachers and scholars".

And yet the current Oxford English Dictionary definition of a university in contrast is "a high-level educational institution in which students study for degrees and academic research is done". In the differences between these two definitions, in which one has as its core the community of scholars and the other what is done, lies the tension in academic work in Australian universities today.

In the 1950s in Australia, the autonomy and freedom of the community of scholars - this 'self-governing' community given license by the state to govern itself - defined the university, its continuity and traditions. And in so doing it also constructed the place for academics and academic work.

The community of scholars built particular features of work for its senior members, the academics or professors. They were accredited as experts by the community for their higher learning, and that expertise guaranteed autonomy in the exercise of that knowledge, including what was taught and how, and what was researched and how. There was intellectual freedom to pursue knowledge and to give it expression. There was a higher degree of flexibility than in many other occupations in the way, where and when work was undertaken. This autonomy, freedom and flexibility were, of course, subject to the governance of the community of scholars, and the traditions developed about teaching and research that were given form in the university.

For over one hundred years Australian academics in universities had many of their conditions of employment determined by the university in which they were employed. Their salaries were initially set by the university, then after the middle of the twentieth century by ad hoc decisions of commissions and finally from 1974 through the federal Academic Salaries Tribunal (O'Brien, 1993).

If we were to look back to academics in Australian universities after the Second World War, as universities grew and Australia began to educate its own staff by awarding doctorates, they did not share in the collective employment regulation of many other employees, including other salaried professionals. Their employment frame of reference was more closely aligned with the doctors and lawyers whom they educated<sup>1</sup>.

### Changes in universities from the 1980s

The elements of the industrial relationships and regulation that we see today in Australian universities were developed in the 1980s. O'Brien (2003) argues that the key events were:

- the 1983 decision of the High Court of Australia<sup>2</sup> that allowed university staff among others to gain access to the federal industrial relations jurisdiction
- the federal registration of the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations (FAUSA) in December 1986<sup>3</sup>
- the 'second tier' wage decision of 1987 and the 'structural efficiency' principle introduced in the 1988 decision, and
- the amalgamation of universities with the more unionised institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education from 1989 in the 'unified national system' introduced by Minister John Dawkins

After these changes of the 1980s came the 1991 decision of the federal industrial relations tribunal that formally introduced enterprise bargaining to the Australian system, and then the *1993 Industrial Relations Reform Act* which entrenched collective bargaining as the dominant means to regulate wages and employment conditions in Australia.

Related to these industrial relations changes, but also due to changes in government policy and university responses, were a series of major organisational shifts that are captured in part in the data explored below.

The figures below have four data points, 1975, 1985, 1995, and 2005. Figure 1 tells the story of the major change in higher education that occurred between 1975 and 1995. In the first decade (1975-1985) it shows a slowly growing university system and an exploding college of advanced education/institute of technology system — where growth of over 155% in the college sector can be compared to some 5% growth in staff numbers in the universities.

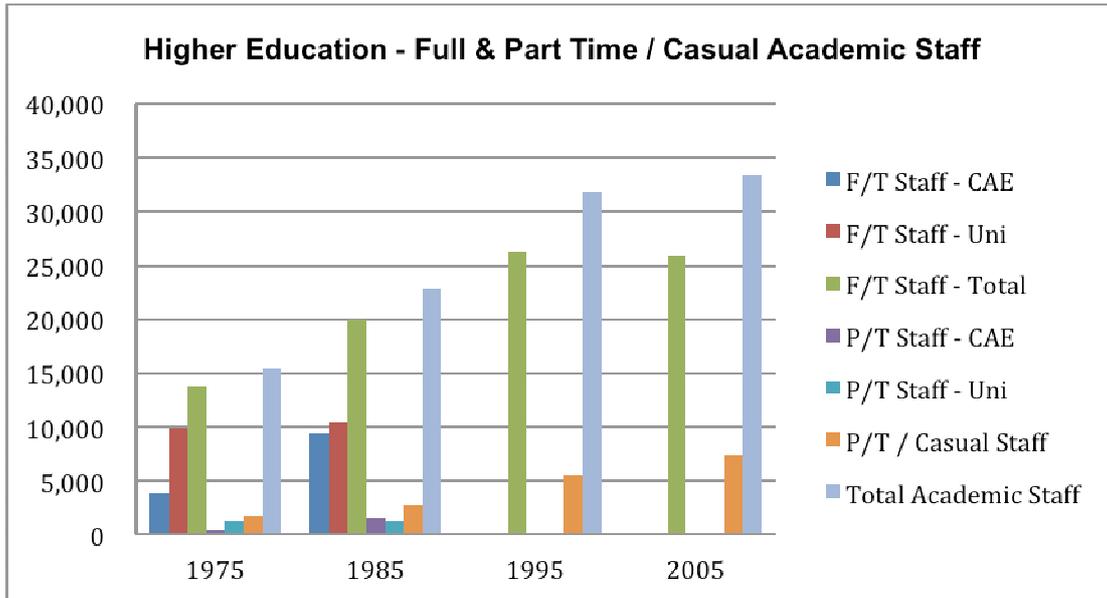
### Figure 1

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<sup>1</sup> There was one notable exception, the University of Technology in NSW, which became the University of NSW, where a registered union covered staff and had salaries set by the NSW Public Service Board and then by the NSW Industrial Commission in 1957 (O'Brien, 1993, 199-200).

<sup>2</sup> R. v Goldham; Ex parte the Australian Social Welfare Union, 47 ALR 225.

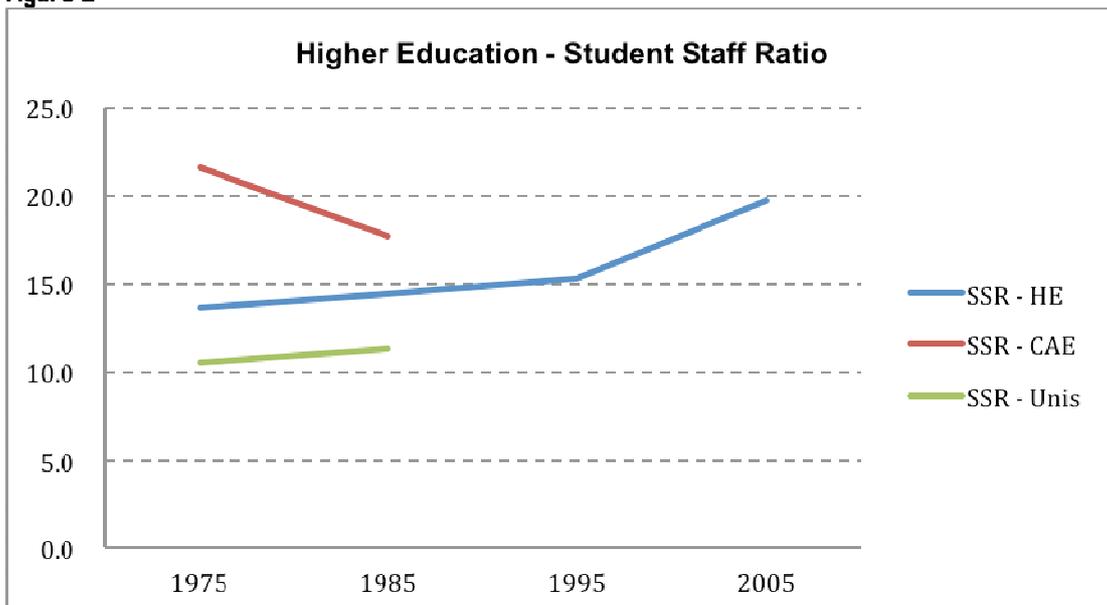
<sup>3</sup> O'Brien (2003) also argues that the federal registration of the association for college of advanced education and institute of technology staff was part of this change. I have not included it because it is the change in universities that is significant, as it is in their traditions that collegial governance and academic autonomy were embedded most strongly.



In the final decade represented (1995-2005), higher education staff numbers grew by around 4.6%, but fulltime and fractional research and teaching staff declined in absolute numbers by 1.3%. It is worth noting that research only staff in universities increased by over 33% between 1995 and 2005.

Between 1975 and 2005, student numbers increased by over 155% from 274,738 to 703,751. Student to staff ratios increased by around 45% during this time as Figure 2 demonstrates. The proportion of casual staff in the academic staff population increased by 45% between 1995 and 2005 to over 22% of full-time equivalent staff.

**Figure 2**



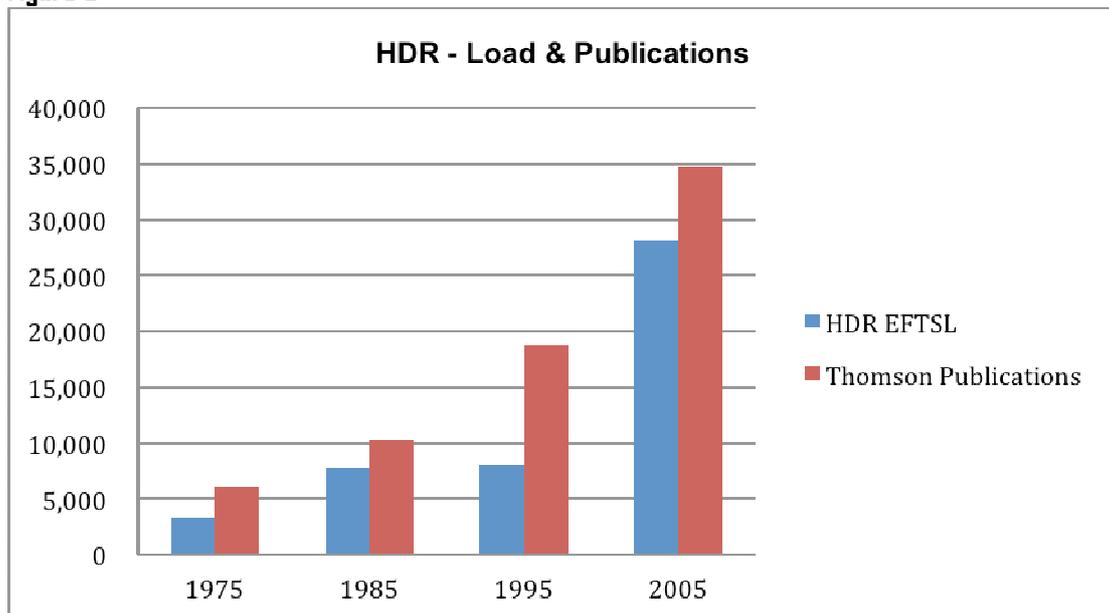
These two figures tell the story of the dramatically changed circumstances of many academic staff in the last twenty to thirty years as the numbers of students for which they were responsible increased and the

numbers of casual or sessional staff, which they coordinate, also increased, as sessional staff became a substantial part of the workforce.

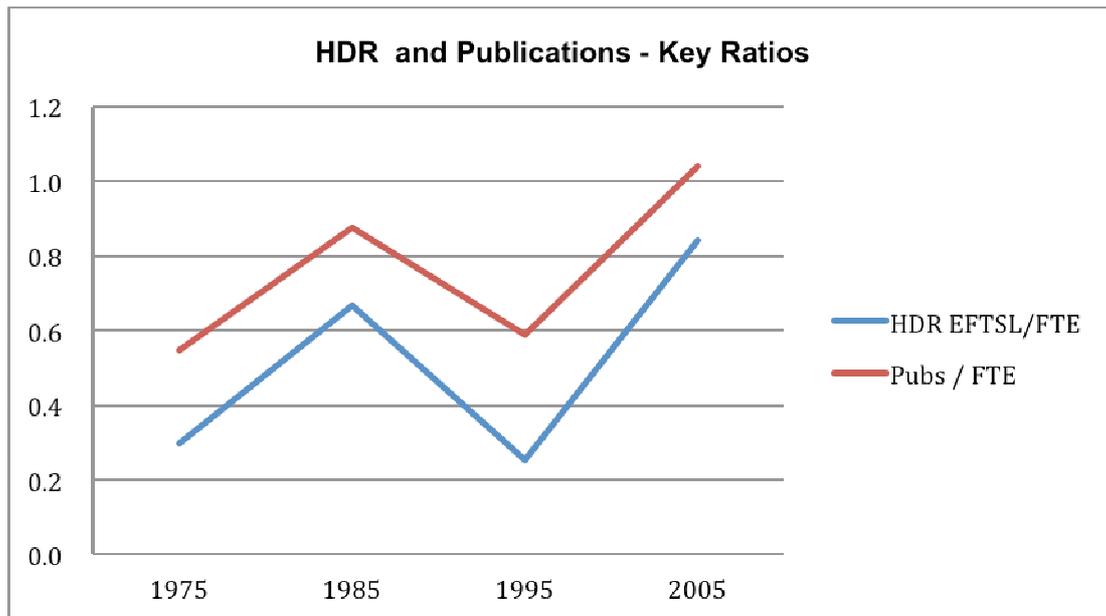
Some would see the signs of major increases in productivity across higher education in terms of students taught, but also in terms of research such as through increased supervision of doctoral students and publication (see Figures 3 and 4).

This is not a productivity increase fuelled by a major technological change. Despite the technological changes in university systems, they have not materially decreased the effort required for teaching and research. In these figures we can see that the experience of such major increases in both teaching and research work for academics in universities is likely to have changed the way they see their jobs and their university.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



A recent large comparative survey of academics (Coates et al. 2009) assesses the satisfaction of Australian academics with their jobs and their universities. On a five point scale Australian academics in the junior and middle ranks (below professorial levels) scored less than 3.5 on that scale, while senior academic staff recorded satisfaction levels closer to 4.0. There were only three countries with lower satisfaction scores for their junior and middle ranked staff (Portugal, United Kingdom and South Africa), although comparative results were more towards the average for Australian professorial staff.

This survey also reports that while Australian academics predominantly express a preference for research balanced with teaching, the ratio of time spent on teaching versus research is higher for junior and middle ranks than for senior ranks. While overall the ratio of teaching to research for Australia maintains the preferred balance<sup>4</sup>, it is clear that hours worked per week have increased in the attempt to keep the preferred balance<sup>4</sup>. This is consistent with the story told by the graphs above.

Australian academics are among the least satisfied of their international peers with management issues, including their level of influence and engagement in their universities. While satisfaction improves with rank it is overall low, and this is confirmed in their low level of satisfaction with the support from their institutions. The broad results derived from Coates et al. (2009) survey is that Australian academics are comparatively dissatisfied with their jobs and their institutions compared to their international peers.

The survey cited above also tried to evaluate relative salaries and job security. Leaving aside the difficulties of comparative analysis when assessing salaries versus overall remuneration, their findings are that Australian salaries are comparable and competitive with their overseas counterparts (Coates et al. 2009:12). Previous evidence (Horsley and Woodburne, 2005) finds that academic salaries, particularly at professorial level, declined against average weekly earnings from the 1970s, although the rate of decline arrested in the 1990s.

<sup>4</sup> The data from this survey on academic hours of work show a reported increase of around 5 hours over the period 1977 to 2007, but in total hours the absolute and proportional time spent on teaching has decreased by 5 hours, while research and administrative activities have more than increased to make up the difference and more.

Figure 1 also indicates the increase in the proportion of academic staff who hold casual or sessional positions in Australian universities. This proportion remains high at over 20% of the full-time equivalent workforce<sup>5</sup>. Brown et al (2010) argue that the increasing casualization of the academic workforce is producing a divide between academics with continuing employment and a marginalised and insecure group of sessional staff who experience isolation from the university community and its life. What is not often remarked is that full-time academic staff routinely now have responsibilities for a number of casual or sessional staff. Indeed, many manage large teams of sessional staff in more than one subject or course.

So the world of work for academic staff in Australian universities has changed significantly since the 1980s and academics evince dissatisfaction with a number of its features.

### **The nature and impact of collective regulation**

Given this contextual information about changes in universities and academic work since the 1980s, I return to the central question of this lecture - how has industrial relations affected the work of academics and their relationship to their universities?

Despite all the changes outlined above, there are some basic characteristics of academic work that are assumed in the way academic jobs are constructed and the way a university operates. A high degree of autonomy over what is taught and researched, that is over what work is done and how it is done, defines an academic's position. Such autonomy is not purely individual autonomy, since it is constrained by collegial notions of what should be done and how it should be done in the field or discipline and in the unit, department or school in which the academic is located. Nevertheless there is an assumption that the academic will control key aspects of their teaching and research.

Academic autonomy is a construct of academic colleagues, (expressed through the Academic Board at its most symbolic) in general, and in the particular field or discipline; and in a correlated way the college of scholars is itself the determinant of what will be done in education and research terms and how it will be done. There is assumed and in reality a form of academic governance of the university, which is separate from and not subservient to the management of the university.

That this remains as a core assumption and has some resonance in the reality of institutional life is clear in the responses of academics, who recognise that they have significant influence at the departmental level (or the level closest to their fields, their teaching and research) (Coates et al. 2008).

In Australia this autonomy has been most recently enshrined in the draft higher education provider registration standards, which provide

“3.7 The governing body protects the academic integrity and quality of the provider's higher education activities through its academic governance arrangements, such as a properly constituted academic board and course advisory committees with appropriately delegated authority. (DEEWR, 2011).”

Autonomy is also coupled with intellectual freedom to profess and research unconstrained by others about what should be done or what should be concluded; again there are ethical, logic and evidence-based requirements that underpin this freedom, but it is a freedom it is from government or organisational

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<sup>5</sup> Not revealed in the above figures is the decline in the proportion of academic staff holding contract appointments, which also represents some 20% of the total academic workforce, but declined slightly over the last two decades.

stricture. Again this has most recently been enshrined in the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Demand Driven Funding System and Other Measures) Act 2011*, which requires institutions to have a policy upholding free intellectual inquiry. This requirement is also evident in current enterprise agreements of Australian universities.

Key aspects of the traditions of academic work, specifically academic autonomy, intellectual freedom and collegial governance, are assumed in the construction of academic work and in the way that universities operate. In Australia the traditions that underpin many of these features of academic work have been embedded in legislative or regulatory instruments in recent times. And academics operate as professionals with a high degree of autonomy in organisational units where there is limited hierarchy in the way work is organised. It is expected that the individual academic will 'know' how to teach and to research and will conduct this work without major oversight of others.

This template remains the bedrock but collective employment regulation and other policy changes have added to it.

The key features of the collective employment regulation of academics were set, as indicated above, in the 1980s and 1990s. FAUSA, one of the precursors to the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), was a staff association. The branches, of which there was one for every university, had substantial autonomy. The federal body had a series of committees, concerning education and research policy and practice, which signaled its status as an association representing academics *qua* academics. Indeed one of its subcommittees was named Industrial Matters, indicating that industrial issues were only one of a number of concerns of members and not the only concern of the association. And its representation of members prior to the advent of the Academic Salaries Tribunal was principally in relation to individual grievances and individual disputes by staff with a university. FAUSA covered academics but not other categories of staff employed by a university.

After the 1983 High Court decision, it was argued that federal registration of FAUSA must be sought to ward off attempted unionisation and fragmentation of academic staff through representation by other registered federal unions (O'Brien 2003:36). There were heated discussions inside FAUSA about what employment matters should be subject to collective regulation, that is what matters should form part of the log of claims that would lead to creation of an award. The consensus of FAUSA at this time was for a limited log of claims and minimal regulation of the employment conditions of academics.

But hard on the heels of federal registration came in quick succession, the impact of the restructuring and efficiency principle (or second tier) and then the structural efficiency principle of the federal Commission on academic employment.

The process that began with the second tier decision of 1987 and continued over two years fundamentally changed the conditions of university staff. As O'Brien (2003) argues the impact of the federal jurisdiction on teaching staff employed in institutes of technology or colleges of advanced education was not major, they had more regulated conditions modeled generally on public service arrangements and had been subject to state tribunals in some cases. But for the universities this was far reaching regulation of employment arrangements by an instrument that was decided beyond their particular university.

In 1989 the most significant changes were the introduction of redundancy and dismissal provisions for academic staff. The redundancy and major change provisions that came through this process were for some

other unions and workers an advance on their current conditions. For academics they spelt the end of tenure<sup>6</sup>.

Tenure for academics was based on the protection of academics, and their academic and intellectual autonomy from the vagaries of university or government funding, and from pressure to compromise their autonomy or intellectual freedom by management or government. This argument for tenure for academics was not unique to universities but was echoed in Australia in arguments about tenure for judges and for heads of government departments. Of these three groups, today only judges in Australia retain protection from dismissal for unsatisfactory performance or on the basis of redundancy.

By 1989, it was clear that academics held continuing employment, subject to performance and to the organisational strength of their university and its constituent parts. The first general performance appraisal systems also came into being in the universities at this time. While these were not really performance management systems, they foreshadowed the stronger oversight of performance that would follow.

Also introduced at this time was a single unified salary structure for university and college academic staff, which was a precursor to the later amalgamation of the sectors and of the unions representing university academic staff and college staff.

O'Brien (2003) argues that the decisive change in union approaches in universities came with the dissolution of the 'binary divide' and the amalgamation of the union of college staff (UACA) with the union of university academics (FAUSA) and the creation of an industry union for higher education, NTEU. It is clear that the more 'unionate' approach to industrial relations and employment regulation that was evident in UACA came to dominate the newly formed union. The inclusion of administrative and professional staff in the NTEU, staff who had previously belonged to unions based in other occupations and industry sectors, also helped to deepen this change in orientation.

At the level of employment regulation also, many of the amalgamations between universities and former colleges of advanced education were facilitated by agreements that 'preserved' or codified particular sets of employment conditions from previous employment in a college of advanced education.

The impact of the national wage policy determinations of the second tier and structural efficiency contributed to the development of a set of national regulations of employment in universities from the removal of de facto tenure (Smith, 1992) to the creation of a single unified salary structure and with this the development of position classification standards. This was followed in the early nineties by the creation of a national code of conditions of employment, which saw national regulation of leave, probation, and promotion. In an era of industrial relations focused on deregulation and flexibility, academic employment erected its first national set of employment regulations.

Further, into the middle of this period of major change in universities and their relations with staff was injected in the 1990s the principle of enterprise bargaining. This was again in the national industrial relations context a move to provide greater flexibility in responding to the circumstances of a particular enterprise, rather than industrial regulation being attached to the demands of a particular occupational or industry grouping.

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<sup>6</sup> There can be arguments about whether tenure was de jure or de facto (Smith, 1992). What is clear is that what academics assumed to be their job security was changed.

Although academics had taken industrial action in the late 1980s in support of their salary claims, salaries were set nationally outside the university. Here with enterprise bargaining, for the first time inside the university an adversarial negotiation over salaries and conditions with unions representing employees, and managers, many of whom had been or still were longstanding members of their relevant staff association or union seated opposite one another. Suddenly and clearly, senior executive staff in universities became managers, accountable for management's side of this bargain.

The general tactics and rhetoric of other unions that had been adopted previously by UACA and then the NTEU, and the tactics and rhetoric of employers that had been adopted by the employers' association, AHEIA, came from the national level into the university directly. Over the years of enterprise bargaining rounds, the tactics and rhetoric of an adversarial bargain have become entrenched in the way employment conditions and salaries are discussed in the universities.

Not just collective regulation of employment, but the constructs of an organisation split by the conflicting interests of employees and the employer have become an accepted part of the university and its approach to academic work.

While the universities were still largely dependent on federal government funding, a national approach and national outcomes from these supposedly enterprise bargains was inevitable (Smith, 1992; Blackford, 1992). So for a time these enterprise bargains showed limited variation from one another on salary outcomes or core conditions.

The NTEU was able to pursue national agendas about key issues that attempted to safeguard job security, increase salaries uniformly across the sector and improve conditions in key areas such as parental leave. Nationally determined standards expressed in enterprise agreements on many matters from the way academic work loads would be addressed, to the circumstance in which fixed term contracts could be offered became part of the fabric of employment regulation. Into these agreements in recent years came a clause to guarantee academic freedom, indicating the extent to which this model of regulation is seen as the way to 'protect' the academic's job.

So pervasive has this national regulation of academic employment conditions become that when the Howard government introduced requirements on universities to offer individually bargained agreements, AWAs, in 2005, the take-up by universities remained very low (Barneveldt, 2009). Collective negotiation and regulation remained the choice of employers as well as unions.

The collectivisation of employment arrangements for academics in Australia, while carrying many of the features of other collective agreements in unionised environments has not neglected some of the core features of academic work. Time and again in negotiations there are points where management and union agree over a feature that is seen as a critical feature of academic work. From academic freedom to the requirement that research be part of the standard expectations of an academic, there has been little difference between the views of the two parties to the bargain. Why? The major reason is because both are attempting to represent and protect academic work and the nature of the university.

Thus, since the 1980s there has been an elaboration of collective employment regulation of Australian academic staff and in universities more generally. There has been the introduction of the symbolic, rhetorical and tactical aspects of a collective bargaining culture. Parenthetically, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century union density and coverage of academic and university staff has declined precipitously in common with many other sectors. Collective agreements and union/employer negotiations over collective arrangements and individual disputes remains the norm, yet university employees are increasingly not members of their union. And

Australian universities despite increasing variation in the outcomes and timing of enterprise agreements as funding becomes less dependent on government and more on national and international markets, are still relatively uniform nationally

### **Tensions and outcomes**

When the path of collective regulation became evident in the 1980s, Professor David Penington, then Chair of AHEIA, and Vice Chancellor of The University of Melbourne, argued that this new model would bring tensions with the collegial forms of governance that characterised universities.

"The confrontation and polarisation characteristic of Australian unionism, he argued, was contributing to the growth of centralized managerialism in universities, which itself altered the collegial nature of institutions. This decline of collegiality could be traced to the identification of higher education as an 'industry' and the granting of a federal award for academics in 1987." (cited in O'Brien, 1993: 197).

Professor Penington might survey the scene today and feel that his words of 1991 were prophetic. It is clear today that many commentators on higher education argue and academics report that Australian universities are characterised by 'top-down' management decisions and complex administrative processes, which are often called 'managerialism' (Coates et al. 2010b).

Have our industrial relations arrangements contributed to or do they merely protect against unfettered 'managerialism'?

It is clear that the way that employment arrangements are discussed tends almost inevitably to the adversarial. The determination of academic workloads is an interesting case in point. In places where academic autonomy is the norm, workloads are set in the unit, department or school, more or less collegially. Collegiality can mean that the senior professorial staff or indeed the senior professor decides what will be done by whom or that the group of colleagues meets and decides on an allocation of teaching<sup>7</sup>.

In Australia there is a requirement in university collective enterprise agreements for a process that secures consultation with all affected staff, for transparency and for processes to deal with the aggrieved. From the unions point of view here are safeguards against exploitation, over-working, inequitable treatment. From the point of view of many managers here are benefits of transparency, consistency, guarantees of effective and efficient allocation of work, and safeguards against inequitable treatment.

When this process is contested it escalates into the relatively rarefied world (from the point of view of the average academic) of negotiations between union and management. When the outcome is an elaborate model decided in part in these forums, it is difficult for an individual academic not to perceive this as a complex administrative process, and as one imposed by management since inevitably the administration of this model will be undertaken by management.

In this brief exploration of the implications of codifying academic workload models which go to the heart of academic autonomy and collegiality, we can see the tensions between collectivist regulation, its intersection with and support of managerialist objectives, and its felt impact on the life and work of the academic.

Industrial relations in Australian universities has erected both a broad framework of collective employment regulation and a set of relationships characterised by a representative of employees, the union, and a

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<sup>7</sup> Collegiality does not mean equity of workload or equitable treatment occurs.

representative of employers, negotiating not just the salaries and employment conditions of academics, but the very fabric of much of their working life. This collective employment regulation in the form of enterprise bargaining has brought the rhetoric and tactics of collective bargaining into the heart of the university's work.

Alongside this framework, the collegiality that underpins academic governance in academic staff designing and revising programs, courses and the materials for their teaching and assessment continues. Despite university review of what degrees and how many subjects or courses, the beating heart of learning and teaching design and delivery is in the hands of academic staff. Similarly despite government research priorities and university chosen areas of focus for research, the selection of questions and agendas for research, its conduct and its communication, is with academic staff and incorporates their intellectual freedom.

There remain a range of academic policies that in most universities are subject to decision by a board of academic peers at university or sub-university level. Decisions about selection and promotion of academic staff rely on peer input. Academic staff retain representative roles on the key governing bodies of their institutions, and a significant proportion of the staff holding executive and management positions in universities are drawn from the ranks of academic staff.

In other words there are still substantial elements of the institutional culture and operations of universities that affirm academic autonomy, collegiality and intellectual freedom. As indicated above, so important are these elements to the notion of a university and an academic that they are in Australia enshrined in various regulatory instruments.

The tension between the two realities described above is clear. In the first the academic is a type of 'knowledge worker' or employed professional. As such they are highly valuable employees, they 'manage themselves' and as Drucker (1999) noted

"knowledge worker productivity requires that the knowledge worker is both seen and treated as an "asset" rather than a "cost." It requires that knowledge workers want to work for the organisation in preference to all other opportunities".

From this perspective the organisation or the university will worry about the salaries and conditions of its academic staff to ensure that they are attracted and retained. Much of the recent discussions about how to develop and attract academic staff (Coates et al 2010a) would fit happily within this framework.

In the second, the academic is the university, the owner, producer and reproducer of its knowledge and culture. In this frame, the college of scholars would decide how they would be organised and rewarded.

The experience of today lies somewhat uneasily between the two. Some elements of work, organisation and reward remain relatively firmly embedded with the academic staff. But the resources that are used to support the university and its staff come from a variety of sources, some with considerable external accountabilities. And the license of the state to be a university increasingly comes with a range of performance, regulatory and accountability expectations. Consequently there are structures and positions that manage these resources and accountabilities and they do so on behalf of the university — which is not necessarily coterminous with the collective views of its academic staff.

The union has attempted to ensure that the knowledge worker is appropriately rewarded. It has substituted its collective mechanisms for the collective regulation of the profession.<sup>8</sup> Academic salaries in Australia have kept pace with international academic comparators. While de facto tenure no longer exists there are employment security safeguards beyond those available to many other workers. Many conditions are in excess of those available in the general community.

There also remain elements of control of work, there are elements of flexibility of work (although this can be a double-edged sword), and there remains opportunity for direct engagement by academics in key decisions. If an academic was only a knowledge worker these might be the signs of a very good job. But it is clear from the survey material of academic opinion about their jobs that for those surveyed some of the elements of an academic 'good' job are missing or being eroded.

## **Conclusion**

The increased regulation and accountability of Australian universities is not a product of their industrial relations. The collectivisation of employment relations occurred alongside and partly in reaction to government reforms to universities. However the collectivisation of employment arrangements, while providing important benefits and protections to staff, has also added a complex layer of regulation to what was once a less regulated environment. And it has done so in the living memory of many of the academics working in universities today.

The 'managerialism' much maligned in Australian universities, is itself in part a response to the increased complexity, regulation and accountability of universities. Its objects in terms of transparent regulation, and equitable arrangements often meet in what might be termed an unholy alliance with those seeking to collectively regulate universities. And these objectives also change the way the university operates.

As is clear from both management and union responses to government policy and in the context of enterprise bargains, there is often agreement about some of the tenets of what should be preserved of academic autonomy, intellectual freedom and collegiality. And collegial forums have often been concerned about excellent performance, particularly in research, and this finds an echo in the management of universities and managerial objectives.

There are tensions, but the regulatory features of the post-1980s world have been intertwined with some of the features of the collegial world that preceded it. How are these tensions unknotted so that we can improve the satisfaction of academics with their jobs and their universities?

We cannot go back. We can be mindful of the way complexity and regulation mounts, the accretion of new regulations and processes should be questioned. As a simple example, life and work will not get better by adding ever more clauses to our enterprise agreements or adding more topics to be the subject of regulation in our universities.

However most important we must go back and look at the features that the data show about how differently our universities are organised today, after all these changes. Fundamentally we must return and look at how we understand the work of an academic.

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<sup>8</sup> Larson (1977) suggested that professionalization is a collective strategy to provide individual gain, a strategy, which is in many ways similar to that of trade unionism in these fields.

The university is still structured (in both its collegial and collectivised forms) as if the lone scholar with academic and intellectual autonomy is the template of an academic. And as if colleagues come together only in those governance settings that decide degree programs, entry levels of students, assessment and examination outcomes and award of grades and degrees. In this lone scholar template, the scholar assembles their materials, teaches their classes, sits with their data, or goes into the field or the laboratory to consult or examine their subjects and consider the results. Some of this teaching and research requires teams and has always required teams — but these teams were small and they were typically few.

We need to recognise that the lone scholar shuffling between classes and research is long gone. And in their place, are many staff teaching in larger teams, and working with different staff, some of whom may be sessional and needing co-ordination; there are higher expectations of research output and more teams developed to both gain research grants and undertake the projects funded. The reality is more complex than the lone scholar cooperating with a small number of their colleagues, exercising their academic autonomy and intellectual freedom.

The work of the academic today in these large and multifarious teams requires multiple skills, typically (not rarely) significant management of and involvement in different teams, and faces greater accountability to people outside their immediate group of colleagues.

It is not that there are tensions between the knowledge worker of our employment arrangements and the academic of our collegial university, but that there is a collision between the reality of academic work in large, complex universities and our construction and understanding of the core requirements and accountabilities of those academic roles.

There are good reasons to preserve the core tenets of our universities and academic work, because they embody the hallmarks of ‘good work’ in every sense of the word. There are good reasons to ensure that all those who are employed have a voice and that management engages with and considers staff when making decisions and fulfilling its accountabilities. In this sense the current uneasy tension between the past and the present will remain with us in universities.

However, there will be no good future if we do not reconceptualise the nature of academic work, and recognise that our full-time and fractional academics are actually the managers of their work in a more contemporary sense than was understood when their academic autonomy and control was seen as the characteristics of the job. Imagine how we would think of support of academics, their work and their reward if we accepted that each would quite quickly be a manager of multiple highly skilled teams in the areas of teaching and research?

This is our challenge in universities — academics were never just a knowledge worker but today they are definitely knowledge managers!

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