

Towards a more academic and democratic University

USAP's recent submission to the Vice-Chancellor's 10-year strategic plan represents the culmination of efforts that started about five years ago with the preparation of a conference entitled "What should universities be?" which was organised by USAP and held in 2018 (1). This submission is not the product of a single individual but of consultations with numerous colleagues. It is attached for your convenience. Many thanks to Professor Artem Prokhorov for co-ordinating.

The submission highlights the need for an improved organisational culture at the University through abidance of academic principles at all levels including by managers, members of Human Resources, audit, and the Office of General Counsel. The submission is backed by the Professional Ethical Framework for Australian Academics (2) recently published by the Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP) which is now one of the largest if not the largest academic organisation in the country with close to 800 professorial members at 39 Australian Universities.

USAP's submission to the University's strategic plan was preceded by significant developments at the national level. Public Universities Australia (PUA) was formed in October last year, an initiative supported by seven organisations (3) that together represent almost all stakeholders of the Australian higher education sector. PUA is already recognised as a major force by politicians including by the Federal Senate, PUA is involved in the preparation of more than one Parliamentary inquiry into university state legislation and PUA is also pressing for a Royal Commission into the governance of Australia's public universities.

The University of Sydney has a key role in the Australian higher education sector, and it is anticipated that any progress made locally to overcome the failings and aberrations of the last decade will have beneficial effects that extend to other universities as well.

Universities are one of the most important protectors of democracy, and this is highly relevant in the current global political climate where authoritarianism is on the rise. "One resists the invasion of armies; one does not resist the invasion of ideas" (Victor Hugo). That is why supporting scholars who think critically and freely to do fundamental research and to mentor students is the most important function of a university. This function of a university necessarily makes the adherence to academic standards by all involved a *conditio sine qua non*.

A number of activities were organised by USAP last year and we would like to thank all members and non-members who contributed. One national seminar stood out particularly because it highlighted the urgent need to rectify damage done to some disciplines locally when the guest speaker from Stanford, Professor Robert Pogue Harrison referred to the humanities as the "Hostels of our Humanity" (4). The true inclusion of their diversity is best achieved in the form of departments which are essential for a university. Many thanks to Professor Suzanne Rutland for chairing this important event and to Professor Brad Buckley for co-organising.

USAP will be hosting an all-professariate meeting to discuss and develop the strategic plan further and intends to collaborate with the University executive on its implementation.

Manuel B. Graeber

USAP President

On behalf of USAP Council

Sydney, 8 August 2022

References

- 1) <https://usap.sydney.edu.au/what-should-universities-be/>
- 2) Professional Ethical Framework for Australian Academics

<https://www.professariate.org/aaup-professional-ethical-framework-for-australian-academics-2/>

Article in THE about it

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/prioritise-academic-mission-over-commercial-targets-urges-code>

3) <https://puau.org/individual-supporters/>

4) <https://puau.org/2022/03/24/how-to-respond-to-the-declining-role-of-the-arts-and-humanities-in-universities/>