

**Academic Freedom and  
Commercialisation of Australian Universities  
Perceptions and experiences of social scientists**

Carole Kayrooz

Pamela Kinnear

Paul Preston

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Carole Kayrooz  
The University of Canberra

Pamela Kinnear  
Research Fellow, The Australia Institute

Paul Preston  
Department of Sociology, The Australian National University

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<b>List of Abbreviations</b>
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AOU	Academic Organisational Unit
ARC	Australian Research Council
Go8	Group of Eight
SPIRT	Strategic Partnerships in Research and Training
UNS	Unified National System
HECS	Higher Education Contributions Scheme

## Executive Summary

This is an exploratory study of social scientists' perceptions and experiences of academic freedom in Australian universities. Academic freedom now operates within a financial environment characterised by increasing reliance on industry research funding, fee-based courses and consulting services. These trends, in turn, involve closer attention to the needs of 'consumers' and 'markets'. The impact of this environment on social scientists' experience of academic freedom is a matter of some concern for the quality of public debate and the health of democratic pluralism. As Australian social scientists' experience has not previously been explored, this study focused particularly on their experience of academic freedom in an environment of commercialisation.

The study was conducted in three phases. The first phase, interviews with 20 key informants, was intended to clarify important dimensions of the topic and to inform the design of the questionnaire. The second phase, a web-based questionnaire that targeted 1000 social scientists from 13 universities across four university types, formed the primary data source for the report. The third phase, 20 follow-up interviews with the questionnaire respondents, sought to elaborate on the questionnaire findings. In total, there were 165 respondents to the questionnaire. As 833 recipients were located from the target sample, this represented a 20 per cent response rate.

A key objective of the project was to identify how respondents defined the concept of academic freedom. Academic freedom was seen to be the right to teach, research and publish contentious issues, to choose their own research colleagues and to feel supported by the institution to speak on social issues in areas of their expertise without fear or favour. Most respondents interpreted academic freedom in terms of individual autonomy, where they thought academic freedom involved the responsible and disciplined exercise of their expertise. Some focused on collegial autonomy, where they viewed academic freedom as the peer-based determination of research and teaching standards. Others focused on institutional autonomy, which they saw as providing the culture and infrastructure that supports individual and collegial autonomy. Some respondents implied that these three levels of autonomy were interlinked and thought that supporting autonomy at these various levels was essential to maintaining the role of universities as important and independent sources of social inquiry.

To understand further how respondents defined academic freedom, they were asked to rate the importance of various aspects. Nearly all of the respondents (92%) rated the freedom to define research topics and methods and to publish without fear of censorship as high in importance. Most rated the freedom to teach contentious propositions (84%) and the right to choose colleagues for research collaboration (82%) as high in importance. A slightly lesser proportion (75%) rated the right to seek peer review, the freedom to determine student standards and the maintenance of intellectual property rights in research as high in importance. The maintenance of intellectual property rights in course design and content was rated least frequently as high in importance. Nevertheless, 61 per cent of respondents rated this aspect as high in importance.

Respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with these same aspects. Respondents were generally moderately or highly satisfied with aspects that seemed to concern individual autonomy. When the ‘moderate’ and ‘high’ satisfaction categories are combined, it appears that most were moderately to highly satisfied with the freedom to define research topics and methods (88%; 43% moderate, 45% high), the freedom to teach contentious propositions (85%; 35% moderate, 50% high), the right to choose colleagues for research collaboration (82%; 28% moderate, 54% high), and the freedom to publish without fear of censorship (80%; 42% moderate, 38% high). Satisfaction was often reported as moderate, rather than high in relation to those aspects of academic freedom that respondents rated as high in importance. For most items, levels of low satisfaction were relatively stable at around 10 – 13 per cent. However, a higher proportion of the sample experienced low satisfaction with the freedom to publish without fear of censorship (16%), the maintenance of intellectual property rights in course design and content (22%), and the freedom to determine student standards (27%).

Commercialisation was viewed as the pressure to market academic work. At the individual level, most reported a reduced amount of research time due to writing grant applications and tenders and had experienced a change in the choice of research projects as a result of the likelihood of funding. Many also had experienced a cross-fertilisation of ideas (67%; 22% to a major extent) and the enhancement of the quality of research (45%; 14% to a major extent) through interaction with external funding bodies. At the collegial level, many reported an increase in competition between colleagues with just over half (51%) experiencing this to a major extent. A number reported experiencing restrictions on sharing ideas with colleagues due to commercial-in-confidence arrangements. At the institutional level, almost all had experienced an emphasis on funded over unfunded research and a valuing of courses that attracted high student enrolments and fee-paying students over other courses.

Direct interference with individual academics’ publication of contentious results was not widespread, although 17 per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced being prevented from publishing contentious results, 12 per cent to a minor extent and 5 per cent to a major extent. Forty-one per cent reported that they had experienced discomfort with publishing contentious research results (13% to a major extent) and almost half (49%) reported that they had experienced a reluctance to criticise institutions that provide large research grants or other forms of support (16% to a major extent). The cause of this reluctance and discomfort was not clear.

In the interviews and open-ended responses elaborating on their levels of satisfaction and concern, respondents regularly stated that despite being generally satisfied at the personal level, they were dissatisfied with a number of systemic effects of commercialisation on academic freedom. Respondents outlined several systemic effects:

- Increased workloads, in part arising from writing competitive tenders and developing and marketing commercial courses, were significantly reducing academics’ independent research time;

- The pressure to attract research funding from industry and a range of consulting and other services increasingly channeled research effort into safe, well-defined areas, rather than speculative or curiosity-driven ones;
- The emphasis on fee-based courses, particularly for domestic and international postgraduates, was lowering student standards;
- The emphasis on fee-based courses benefited disciplines that were vocational, rather than speculative and critical, and sometimes redirected academics' teaching focus to areas tangential to their expertise;
- The drive to market flexible fee-based courses, particularly on-line courses and distance packages, challenged the ownership of course material and had the potential to erode academics' intellectual capital; and
- The emphasis on 'market' demand required more corporate management structures in universities which, in turn, eroded collegial decision-making structures.

The seriousness of these systemic effects was reflected in the quantitative data on respondents' concern and perception of deterioration in academic freedom. Almost all of the respondents (92%) reported a degree of concern about the general state of academic freedom in their universities, with over one-third (37%) reporting major concern. In similar fashion, when asked about changes to the state of academic freedom over the past four years, the majority (73%) reported that there had been a deterioration. Nearly one-half of the sample (45%) thought that there had been a minor deterioration and over one-quarter (28%) a major deterioration. Only four respondents (2%) thought that the situation had improved. The majority (81%) of those who thought that there had been a deterioration in the state of academic freedom related these changes to an increasing commercialisation of their university, 48 per cent to a major extent, and 33 per cent to a minor extent. In the interviews, respondents generally thought that the situation in universities would become unacceptable if commercialisation directly affected their freedom to teach, research and publish without fear of censorship and their right to associate with research colleagues of their choosing.

These findings add to the debate between government, industry, universities and academics about the directions commercialisation is taking higher education in Australia and the place of academic freedom in this environment. The consistency of reasons given for systemic concern across the range of disciplines or subject areas and universities (where one would not expect close communication) suggests that some of these issues may be endemic and, at the least, require further investigation. This raises a number of questions for public and university policy and points to the need to understand more fully the relationship between commercialisation of university work and academic freedom.

## 1. Introduction

*Changes in sources of funds for ... universities could ... have implications for academic freedom. If we accept that he who pays the piper can at least suggest a tune, then a number of possibilities become apparent. With government funding an ever-diminishing share of the total expenditure of universities, the pressure is on to find alternative sources. It is not difficult to imagine situations in which a totally commercially focused council or board might exert at least subtle pressures to ensure that the university staff or students did not in some way offend major donors. Having already seen some major potential donors walk away from the university after failing to prevent the publication of some research work, I do not make this suggestion merely as a piece of idle speculation.*

*Bruce Ross, Vice-Chancellor, Lincoln University, New Zealand  
Graduation address, 1996<sup>1</sup>*

This is an exploratory study of social scientists' perceptions and experiences of the state of academic freedom in Australian universities in an environment of increasing commercialisation of higher education. The study limits its scope to the effects of commercialisation on academic freedom in the social sciences for four main reasons. First, the relationship between academic freedom and commercialisation is complex and a comprehensive coverage of them across all disciplines and universities is beyond the scope of this discussion paper. Secondly, commercialisation has different effects on academic disciplines depending on the marketability of the knowledge they produce. Covering the broad spectrum of academics at this exploratory stage may confound these different effects. Thirdly, the impact of commercial activities on academic freedom for the social sciences is largely unexplored.<sup>2</sup> Fourthly, social scientists are regularly engaged in critical social commentary and analysis, in which contentious issues frequently arise, and for which the existence of academic freedom is important. These activities may be affected by commercially targeted funding. Moreover, social scientists sometimes sit further to the political left than other academic groupings and their views may thus come into conflict with government policy and the practices or philosophy of external funding agencies.

The study found that a small number of instances of direct interference was reported by respondents in their teaching and research activities. Most respondents were moderately or highly satisfied with many aspects of academic freedom. It also found a difference between social scientists' rating of the importance of academic freedom and their satisfaction with some aspects of academic freedom. They attributed this to commercialisation. Most respondents were concerned about the state of academic freedom and reported deterioration in their academic freedom due to commercialisation over the last four years. The study also found that commercialisation has produced substantial systemic effects on social scientists experience of academic freedom. These findings add to the debate between government, industry, universities and academics about the directions

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Kelsey, 1998

<sup>2</sup> A notable exception to this is found in Israel's work on the impact of commercialisation on criminological research in Australia Israel, 2000

commercialisation is taking higher education in Australia and the place of academic freedom in this environment (e.g., Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Marginson 1997a; Marginson & Considine 2000; Vidovich & Currie 1998). The next section outlines the background to the study and relevant literature on academic freedom.

### **1.1 Background to the study**

The idea of academic freedom in Australia is intrinsically linked to the notion of a university as a ‘public good’, a site of nation-building and an upholder of citizenship and democratic values (Marginson and Considine 2000, p. 28). A greater emphasis on the private benefits of higher education and the commercial benefits of knowledge transforms the boundaries in which this idea of academic freedom has operated (Neave 1988, p. 39). The challenge to the ‘public university’ by the ‘enterprise university’ is part of this larger debate about academic freedom (Marginson and Considine 2000; Meek and Wood 1997).

The effects of commercialisation should be understood within the broad economic, political, financial and management environment in which academics now work. This includes: increased bureaucratic and political involvement in higher education policy making and administration; reduced operating grant funding to universities; increased costs to universities from unfunded academic salary increases and increasing student numbers; the operation of HECS; a new corporate style of university management; and various university commercial activities. Teasing out the effects of commercialisation in this environment is a complex process. Commercial activities by universities that directly influence academic work include: the expansion of fee based courses for international and domestic graduate and undergraduate students; attracting research funds from industry; and the sale of consulting and other university services (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999, p. 4; Marginson 1997b; ARC 1999; ARC 2000; AVCC Key Statistics 2000, Table C.1; Meek & Wood 1997; DETYA 2000a & b).

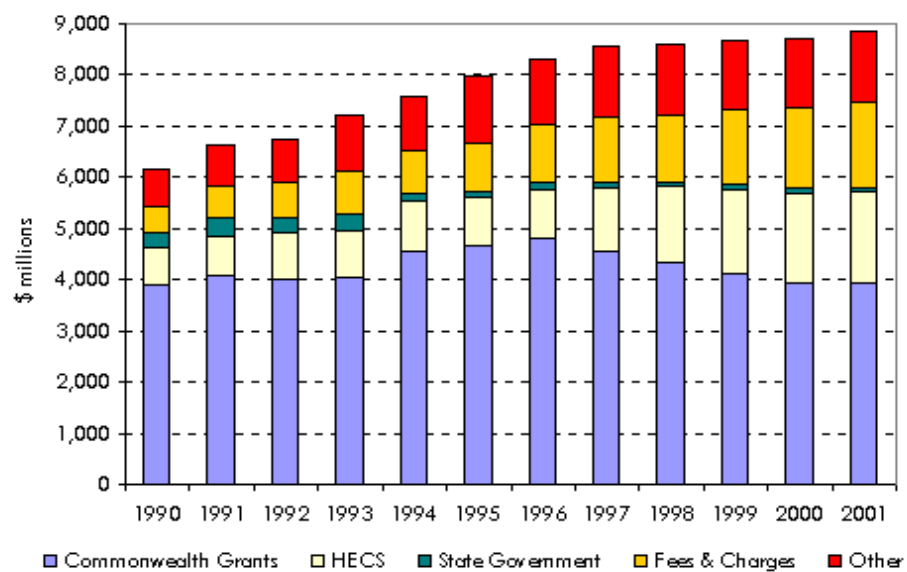
Commercial activities have been encouraged by specific government policies (DETYA 2000b, p. 3). Since 1996 the Commonwealth Government has continued to encourage universities to develop various market-based revenues to make up the difference between government grants and university expenditure. These policy levers have included a 6 per cent reduction in operating grants over four years; an increase in HECS, the introduction of differential HECS, the enrolment of full-fee paying domestic undergraduate students, charging of fees for graduate coursework, increased commercialisation and competition in research, enhanced relationships with industry and the private sector and the encouragement for institutions to adopt corporate models of management (Meek and Wood 1998).

These factors, along with significant reductions in government funding, are important to an analysis of the effects of commercialisation on academic freedom. There is an important relationship between funding, institutional autonomy – the capacity of educational institutions to set and control research and teaching programs – and academic freedom operating in the Australian higher education environment. Anderson and Johnson argue that ‘institutional autonomy is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for academic freedom’ (1998, p. 8). Karmel has commented that the principal threat to institutional autonomy is the manner in which government funds are made available (1998, p. 49). It is thus not possible, argues Karmel, to

conclude that institutional autonomy has been improved by the policies of the previous decade.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, although increases in funding from competitive sources since 1996 has prevented overall falls in funding levels, it has not been adequate to enable growth in the sector. While university revenue is projected to grow to \$9.8 billion in 2003, government grants (including HECS) will be held at the equivalent of their 1996 level (DETYA 2000b, p. 7).

**Figure 1. Total higher education revenue, 1990–1997 (actual) and 1998–2001 (estimated)**



Source: (DETYA, 1999)

Universities now need to sell their teaching, research and expert services to both the government and private sectors to generate sufficient income for operational requirements in this new competitive environment. Although commercialisation is not as advanced as overseas, and Australian higher education operates in a distinctly different environment, concerns arising from increased commercialisation are beginning to emerge (Coady, 2000; Israel 2000; Marginson, 2000; Marginson and Considine, 2000). The particular regime of competition for funding introduced in Australia has potentially far-reaching consequences for academic practice and values and hence, academic freedom in Australian universities. Marginson and Considine argue that these policy and funding changes affect the way in which academic freedom operates in Australian universities (Marginson & Considine 2000, p. 28). Before reviewing the literature on the effects of commercialisation on academic freedom, however, it is necessary to define academic freedom.

## 1.2 What is academic freedom?

In any discussion of academic freedom it is important not to idealise the university as a haven somehow separate from society. Institutions of higher learning are, and have always been, dependent on funding, whether from the State or the market, church or

private wealth. Such dependence of necessity produces a vulnerability to influence. Because of this, universities behave in ways that will ensure continuing funding from those on whom they depend (Fox-Piven 1983, p. 19). Thus, the protection and negotiation of academic freedom is an ongoing project within the specific and peculiar pressures and threats of any particular era. The political and economic environment and its accompanying funding regime will always pose challenges to the extent to which universities are free and autonomous institutions, within which individual academics can teach and research free from the influence of vested interests (Anderson and Johnson 1998, p. 8; Marginson 1997a; Neave 1988). Thus, a key focus of this study is on how commercial activity promoted by the current political, economic, management and academic environment may influence the way social science academics are exercising their academic freedom.

The idea of academic freedom is the ‘key legitimating concept of the entire enterprise’ of the university and lies at the ‘heart of political battles over the future of the public university’ (Menand, 1996 p. 4). At its simplest, academic freedom is understood as a negative right of individual academics – that is, the right to non-interference in their pursuit of knowledge:

... the freedom of the teacher or research worker in higher institutions of learning to investigate and discuss the problems of his (*sic*) science and to express his conclusions, whether through publication or in the instruction of students without interference from political or ecclesiastical authority or from the administrative officials of the institution in which he is employed, unless his methods are found by qualified bodies of his own profession to be clearly incompetent or contrary to professional ethics (Arthur Lovejoy, quoted in (Worgul, 1992, p. 4).

However, academic freedom is more than this. Definitions need to incorporate institutional autonomy, take account of the way that government policies structure research and teaching choices, and include the extent to which the institutional and policy environment allows opportunities for the pursuit of controversial or challenging ideas (Kaplan & Schrecker, 1983; Marginson, 1997a). Placing limits on the capacity of universities to set their own priorities for teaching or research can, in turn, place subtle or overt downward pressures on the autonomy of individual academics.

In order to address these issues, Tight prefers this broader definition:

Academic freedom refers to the freedom of individuals to study, teach, research and publish without being subject to, or causing undue interference. Academic freedom is granted in the belief that it enhances the pursuit and application of worthwhile knowledge, and as such is supported by society through the funding of academics and their institutions. Academic freedom embodies an acceptance by academics of the need to encourage openness and flexibility in academic work, and of their accountability to each other and to society in general (Tight 1988, p. 132).



Defined in this broader way, it becomes clear that the idea of academic freedom requires strong community and institutional support of key academic values. While the Australian experience differs from that of other countries, it incorporates a specific set of relationships between the individual academic, the academic community, institutional management, the government and the wider community, that is undergoing a process of change.

Threats to academic freedom are by no means new, having existed in one form or another for as long as the university and fluctuating according to the funding arrangements and political issues of the time. Similarly, concerns about academic freedom were paramount when academics fought for the inclusion in university teaching of previously excluded fields, and anti-government sentiments during the Vietnam War (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity and peace) (Martin, 1986). Kaplan and Schrecker (1983, p. 6-7) have also pointed out that academic freedom has often been limited by 'oppressive self-regulation' that earlier styles of university administrative structures imposed upon academics.

### **1.3 Research on academic freedom and commercialisation in Australia.**

Despite the wealth of anecdotal evidence and debate, there has been little systematic empirical research on experiences of academic freedom in Australia. One notable exception to this is a study by Vidovich and Currie (1998) of perceived changes in accountability requirements and individual autonomy amongst academics in three Australian universities between 1990 and 1995. This study found a change in the nature and direction of academic work towards greater accountability and reduced autonomy.

Two recent surveys of Australian academics' perceptions of work roles and workloads, while not looking at academic freedom directly, reported on academics' satisfaction with related aspects of their work (McInnis 1999; NTEU 2000). The NTEU survey found that 81.9 per cent of academics reported an increase in stress between 1996 and 1998. Nevertheless, the study also found that the majority of academic staff was satisfied with their job despite significant increases in dissatisfaction. Those dissatisfied with their ability to exercise intellectual freedom had almost doubled from 14.9 per cent to 28 per cent. Those satisfied with their ability to exercise intellectual freedom had fallen from 59.4 per cent to 51.4 per cent. The areas of greatest stress included workload, university climate/morale, lack of time for research/reading, university management, deadlines, staffing levels, interruptions, lack of support staff, level of research funding, marking students' work, administration, continual change, level of teaching funding (all reported by over two-thirds of respondents). Lack of job autonomy and lack of intellectual freedom were both reported as sources of increasing stress by just under one-third of respondents (NTEU 2000, pp. 35, 39).

McInnis found that major shifts in the sources of work satisfaction for academics had taken place between 1993 and 1999, with satisfaction falling from 66 per cent to 53 per cent (McInnis 1999). The most critical shift was a 13 per cent decline in satisfaction with the opportunity to pursue personal academic interests. McInnis concludes that:

We are perhaps at a critical point for the academic profession where the amount of hours worked, and the diffusion and fragmentation of tasks seriously threatens the quality of both research and teaching. The management of academic work is one of the biggest challenges facing Australian universities (McInnis 1999 p.63).

Other authors have identified a range of systemic effects on academic freedom due to commercialisation. First, Vidovich and Currie (1998) argue that work intensification and lack of time have been found to have a systemic, or 'de facto' effect on the autonomy of individual academics because of the reduction in time available for research or to attend to quality in teaching (Vidovich & Currie 1998, p. 202). High workloads do not necessarily translate into a reduction of academic freedom, for researchers may still have the freedom to pursue independent research in the time that is available. Although a proportion of academics' salaried time is officially earmarked for research, much of which can be undertaken on a non-competitive basis, increasing requirements and other activities (outlined below) can markedly reduce this time. These activities, combined with performance requirements for frequent publications, creates a situation in which theoretical or methodologically complex research – especially of a long-term nature – is less likely to be rewarded. In this sense, academics' freedom to conduct research of their choosing is constrained.

Work intensification is the product of a range of factors. Many of these are largely unrelated to commercialisation such as increased requirements for accountability and reporting, increased bureaucratisation of universities, higher number of HECS students, reductions in research and teaching assistance and the introduction of new technologies for teaching. However, work intensification is also driven by factors directly related to commercialisation such as the substantial increases in fee-paying students, the development and teaching of on-line and/or overseas courses and the amount of time spent by academics in preparing applications for competitive funding, networking with industry, community or government partners and otherwise locating sources of financial support for their research.

Second, commercialisation results in the channeling of academic work (both teaching and research) into commercially viable areas (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999, p. 12). Academics are thus less able to choose, according to their professional discretion and expertise, areas of research that they consider relevant, potentially important or worth pursuing. Instead, research decisions are structured by the extent to which projects are likely to attract funding which, in turn, narrows project definition and the parameters of independent work (Marginson and Considine 2000, p. 248). Marginson and Considine argue,

The channeling of research in accordance with funding opportunities ... results in a tendency to concentrate research into safe, non-risky research areas, and tends to favour established areas of research at the expense of new ones (Marginson and Considine 2000, p. 171, 173).

Marginson and Considine also found that commercial pressures were directing academics into research areas outside their main area of expertise (Marginson and Considine 2000, p. 165, 173, 248). Linking external funding and promotion opportunities is particularly significant for those researchers who do not necessarily

require large amounts of funding for their research projects and who do not apply for competitive funding. Whilst this may free researchers from the time constraints associated with seeking such funds it also may jeopardize their career prospects.

Third, commercialisation has been accompanied by new performance and accountability criteria which produces an ‘inevitable tension between quantity and quality’ (Marginson and Considine 2000, p. 171). The question of quality, they argue, is largely ignored in performance criteria. To some extent this is offset by the provision of internal funds by universities for research as well as the substantial funds available from the ARC and NHMRC which are allocated by peer review rather than on economic or commercial criteria. However, these funding channels are highly competitive, take considerable amounts of time to prepare and have a success rate of only 20 per cent per year. Moreover, Research Quantum funding is allocated amongst universities according, in part, to the volume of research and publication. Assessment of quality is thus left to the disciplines themselves, or to publishers. Marginson and Considine argue that this tends to reward those closest to current government thinking and industry practices and changes the idea of the university and the dynamics of research excellence (Marginson and Considine 2000, p. 172). New performance measures driven by economic and commercial criteria also inhibit the conduct of long-term, basic research in favour of the short-term goals of funding agencies,

In universities in which ... resources are marshalled according to an institutional plan, formula or quasi-market competition rather than heterogeneous disciplinary logics ... conformity and low-risk taking are common, the intellectual risks provided by basic research tend to find less favour (Marginson and Considine 2000, p. 174).

This is an exploratory study of social scientists’ perceptions and experiences of academic freedom in Australian universities. It particularly focuses on how academic freedom now operates in the context of the commercial factors outlined in this chapter. The following chapters outline the methodology and results of this study. Chapter Two describes the methodology used to collect the data as well as describing the limitations of the study. Chapter Three then outlines how social science academics define the concept of academic freedom, the importance of various aspects of academic freedom and levels of satisfaction with these aspects. Chapter Four describes respondents’ levels of concern about the state of academic freedom. It also describes their perceptions of change in relation to academic freedom over recent years and the relationship of this change to commercialisation. Chapter Five goes on to document the experiences of academics in relation to academic freedom and commercialisation. Chapter Six then discusses the implications of the study’s findings for public policy and further research.

## 2. Methods and sample characteristics

### 2.1 Gathering data

This report was commissioned by the Australia Institute and devised and conducted over the period August 2000 to January 2001. Information was gathered on social scientists' experiences of academic freedom within an environment of commercialisation by using a mixed method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative elements. This approach was necessary to explore and describe the topic, to show the proportions affected and to find relative effects on the different sections of the population under study.

There were three discrete but overlapping phases to the approach. The first phase, interviews with key informants, was intended to clarify important dimensions of the topic and to inform the design of the questionnaire. The second phase, a survey questionnaire, formed the primary source of data for the study. Follow-up interviews, the third phase, sought to confirm and elaborate on questionnaire findings.

Phase One consisted of 12 interviews with key informants purposively selected to explore the range of views on academic freedom and commercialisation. Phase Two involved a web-based questionnaire survey sent to 1000 social scientists from 13 universities across four university types in the Australian sector. Phase Three consisted of 20 in-depth telephone interviews selected from 53 respondents volunteering from the questionnaire sample.

### 2.2 Phase One: Interviews with key informants

An interview schedule was designed around each of the critical dimensions of the study derived from the literature review (see Appendix A). Twelve key informants were selected to explore these critical dimensions and to inform the design of the questionnaire. Criteria for selection included the range of attitudinal differences that might arise from gender, levels of appointment, institutional type, involvement in industry funding and consultancies and background in higher education issues. Thus, key informants included six males and six females, two academics at professorial level, three at associate professor level, five at senior lecturer level and two at lecturer level. Six informants were selected from the research intensive Sandstones and Redbrick universities and six informants from the teaching-focused New universities (see Section 2.3). Most had some involvement with industry funding and four were involved in this activity to a large extent. Four had published on current issues in higher education. Interviews were conducted in small groups in late August and September 2000.

### 2.3 Phase Two: Questionnaire survey

*Questionnaire design* A web-based questionnaire directed to respondents who were contacted by means of an introductory e-mail. Eighteen questions over four web-pages explored academics' background details, research activities and funding, the meaning of academic freedom, the importance of and satisfaction with academic freedom, experience and concern about the state of academic freedom in the current

environment of commercialisation (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was also designed to investigate any perceptions of changes to academic freedom over the past four years, the extent to which these changes were perceived to be due to commercialisation and the strategies that academics used to enhance academic freedom. The web page was e-mailed out in early November 2000 with two follow-ups in December 2000 and January 2001. While this non-teaching period was not ideal for maximising the number of returns, it accorded with time and economic parameters of the study.

The web-based format was selected for ease of access, response and processing (most academics had access to e-mail and Internet facilities). The disadvantages of web-based questionnaires can arise from difficulties in locating respondents and with technical problems arising from the system itself. Response rates can be reduced by a number of factors such as academic mobility, workload and e-mail overload, institutional up-dating of Internet pages, institutional restructuring and system load.

*Sample* The sample was limited to 1000 Australian social scientists drawn from 13 universities across four states. Specific discipline/subject categories included both traditional and newer groupings: Sociology/Social Sciences, Economics/Commerce, Education, Political Science, Management/Industrial Relations, Media and Communications. The sample distribution across the discipline/subject categories was reasonably evenly spread although not all universities offered all discipline/subject categories. The sample is described and analysed in Section 2.5.

The discipline/subject categories were determined by approximating the groupings contained in the Academy of Social Science Report (1998). The difficulties of determining disciplinary-based academic classification are well-known in the literature (eg. McInnis 1999). Since the amalgamations and reforms of the higher education sector in the 1990's, academic organisational units have moved from a disciplinary basis to cross- and trans-disciplinary basis for schools and centres, thus increasing the problems of academic classification and, by extension, statistical accuracy.

The sample was purposively selected so that an even distribution across the four university types could be gained. University types developed by Marginson (1997b & 1999) were used. These included:

1. Sandstones and Redbricks (Go8) universities, established prior to 1949 as well as research intensive universities built after the end of the second world war;
2. Gumtree universities, built in the 1960's and 1970's, consequent to the Martin report but before Dawkins created the unified national system;
3. New Universities, comprising old Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Higher Education and created after the UNS ie post Dawkins;
4. Unitech universities, which grew from the large institutions of technology, some of which have been in operation for over a century.

For reasons of confidentiality and the sensitivity of the nature of some of the material, university types rather than particular universities are named in the report. Academic organisational units (AOU) consisting of social scientists were located by accessing the web site for each university in the sample and then locating faculty/departments or

research centres that seemed likely to contain the subject or discipline. Within some of the AOU's, and particularly in the newer universities and areas of cross-disciplinary study, individual academic profiles were examined to determine their identity as social scientists in the designated categories. In some cases, where this identity was not clear, further information was obtained from the university.

*Pilot* The questionnaire was piloted with 55 academics and spread across the four institutional categories: Sandstones and Redbricks (18); Gum trees (21); New Unis (11); and Unitechs (5). As the response rate for the pilot was low (11%), feedback was sought from members of the pilot group. In response to this feedback, the e-mail method was changed from group to individual mailouts, several of the closed-ended items were modified and three of the open-ended items were deleted, shortening the time taken to complete the questionnaire.

*Analysis of the results* Preliminary findings of the study were reported on by the Sydney Morning Herald on 8th January 2001. This coverage took place before the third round of questionnaires and final interviews. The project subsequently received significant national media attention. At the point of the Sydney Morning Herald article, approximately 80 per cent of the questionnaire results had been received and approximately one-half of the interviews had been conducted. Responses received before and after were compared to check for any influences of the publicity. Chi-square tests were conducted for the three main items in the questionnaire (17a, 17b, and 17c, see Appendix B) and showed no significant differences before and after media attention.

Two raters independently analysed the open-ended items in the questionnaire survey for frequency of category response. Both raters developed coding categories and assessed frequencies. Inter-rater reliability for frequency of category response for each of the open-ended items was high,  $r = 0.8$  or above.

## **2.4 Phase Three: In depth interviews**

Fifty-three questionnaire respondents volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews, the purpose of which was to confirm, clarify and elaborate on the questionnaire findings. Twenty respondents were ultimately available for telephone interviews. The interview sample covered the four institutional groupings: Sandstones (8), Gumtrees (4), New Universities (4) and Unitechs (4). Two pilot interviews were conducted but subsequent changes to the interview schedule were so minor that these interviews were included in the final sample (For the final interview schedule, see Appendix D).

The final sample included ten females and ten males, 19 continuing and one non-continuing appointments. The sample was spread across the three levels: Associate Professor (7); Senior Lecturer (8); and Lecturer (5). Eight academics had been in universities over 21 years, five for 11-20 years, two for 6-10 years, one for 2-5 years and four under two years. The sample was also reasonably spread across the subject/disciplinary areas.

## 2.5 Sample characteristics

*Response rate.* The location rate of the questionnaire survey was 83 per cent (i.e., after excluding repeat and problem addresses, the number of located responses out of all respondents reduced the sample from 1000 to 833). Thus, the response rate, or proportion of academics who completed the questionnaire, was 20 per cent ( $n = 165$ ). This is a low level of response possibly attributable to the timing of the project, the generally poor response rate for mail out surveys (5-30%), academic overwork and 'survey fatigue' (Neumann 2000). When interviewees were asked for their views on the response rate, they attributed it to rapid change in the university sector, aligning this with much research activity and consequent 'survey fatigue'. The study was conducted between August 2000 and January 2001. The distribution of the questionnaire and first reminder notice were timed to coincide with the end of the teaching year and prior to academics leaving for the summer break. The final reminder was timed to coincide with their return from summer break but some weeks prior to the start of teaching. Despite timing the distribution carefully in this way, it may be the case that this period was, in fact, not optimum for obtaining a high response rate.

*Institutional categories represented in sample.* The sample included academics from Marginson's four university types (see Section 2.3). The largest percentage of respondents came from the Sandstone universities (35%), the next from the Universities of Technology (25%), followed by the Gum trees (21%), and the New Universities (12%). Differences in response rate across the four institutional categories was significant (using  $X^2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The Sandstones and Redbricks had a higher response rate and the other universities, a lower response rate.

**Table 1 Questionnaire response rates for the institutional categories**

Institutional categories	Sandstones and Redbricks	Unitechs	Gumtrees	New Unis	Total
Total n questionnaire recipients	238	224	202	167	833
Percentage response rate for each category	24 ( $n=56$ )	18 ( $n=40$ )	14 ( $n=29$ )	17 ( $n=28$ )	20 ( $n=165$ )*
Percentage of total sample	34	24	18	17	100**

\* This figure does not include those who did not indicate their institution = 12 (7%)

\*\* This figure includes the 7% who did not indicate their institution.

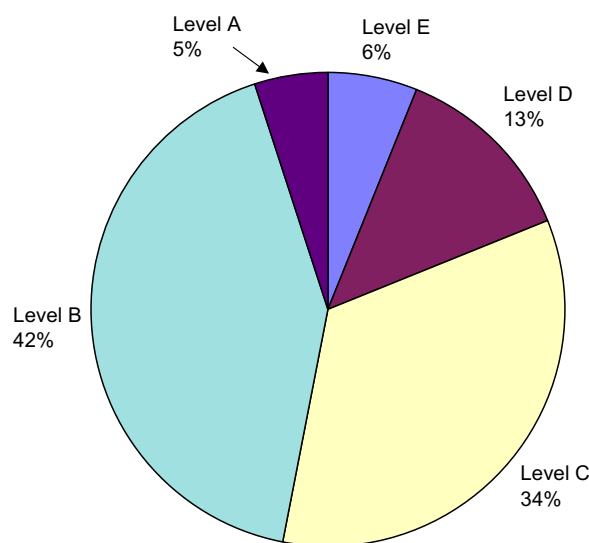
*Gender distribution* Females were moderately over-represented in the present study in comparison to their proportion nationally (42% compared with 34.5%). This over-

representation of females in the sample is consistent with the higher proportions of females responding to questionnaires in general (e.g., McInnis 1999).

*Nature of appointment* The majority of the sample (93%) were continuing employees, only 6 per cent were non-continuing. Academics in casual and tutoring positions were deliberately excluded for reasons of accessibility and length of service.

*Level of appointment* The sample included academics across all levels of appointment. Three-quarters of the sample were Level B (eg. Lecturer/Research Fellow) (42%) or Level C (eg. Senior Lecturer) (34%). One fifth of the sample was Level D (eg. Associate Professor/Reader) (14%) or Level E (eg. Professor) (5%) and Level A (eg. Associate Lecturer/Tutor/Postdoctoral Fellow) was in the minority at five per cent (see Figure 2). Thus the Level C appointments were over-represented by comparison with the population and the Level A appointments, under-represented (see Appendix F). These proportions are similar to a recent survey of Australian academics (McInnis 1999) involving 2 609 academics. As in McInnis' study, the rank of Level C was also over-represented and the rank of Level A under-represented, ( $p < .05$ ). Two questionnaire respondents mentioned that they felt uncertain of their response because they had not been in their positions for long enough to comment with confidence.

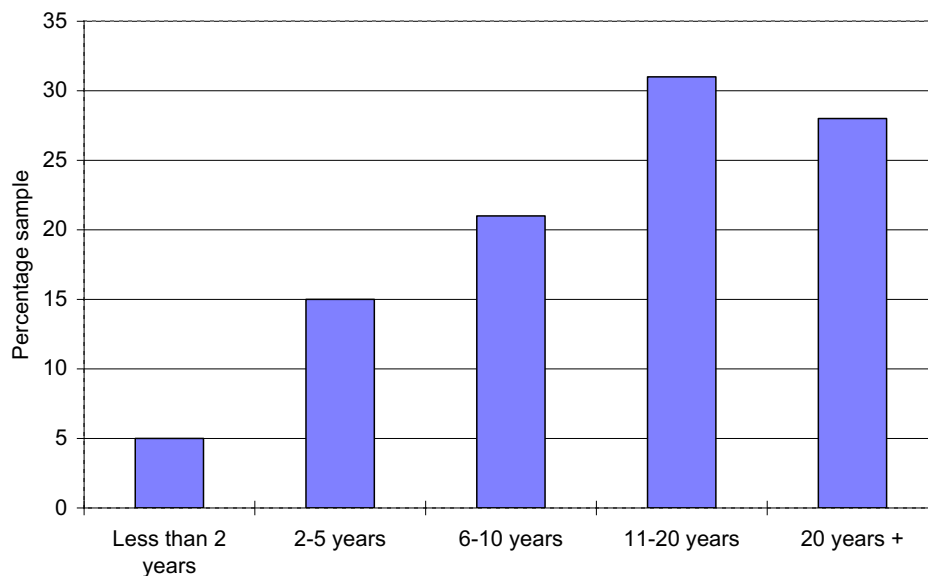
**Figure 2. Level of academic appointment**



*Length of time in universities.* The majority of the sample (81%) had been working in universities for six years or more. The modal range of the sample was 11-20 years, although, as can be seen from Figure 3, an almost equal proportion had worked for 20 years and longer.

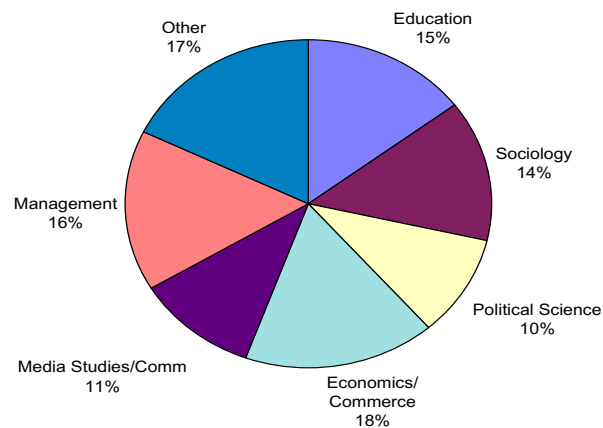


**Figure 3. Length of time as an academic**



*Subject/disciplinary areas* One-third of the sample was drawn from Economics/Commerce (18%) and Management (16%). The rest were drawn from Education (15%), Sociology (14%), Media Studies/Communication (11%) and Political Science (10%) (see Figure 4). The category 'other' (17%) of the sample was a diverse group of academics in disciplines such as social work, welfare and social policy as well as from smaller social studies disciplines such as women's/gender studies and Aboriginal studies. Other areas also represented in this category are cultural studies, Asian studies, social history, urban planning, public and sexual health.

**Figure 4. Sample distribution by subject/disciplinary area**



*Work allocation load.* On the whole, the respondents showed a typical work allocation spread between teaching, research and administration. Most of the sample (85%) were engaged in undergraduate teaching, and research and publication. The next greatest proportion of the sample (83%) was engaged in administration. Respondents were least engaged in postgraduate supervision (66%) and postgraduate course teaching (60%) (see Table 2).

Respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of total time made available for each activity. The greatest proportion of time was spent on undergraduate teaching (34%) followed, in turn, by research and publication (21%). It is noteworthy that a similar approximate 2:1 ratio teaching to research load was found in the McInnis sample (1999) and seems to reflect the typical workload allocation found in the teaching period. The pattern for the proportion of other activities is also similar to McInnis' larger sample and suggests a typical workload pattern for these activities.

**Table 2 Academic activities (%)**

<b>Response rate = 96%</b>	<b>% sample engaged in activity</b>	<b>Average % of total activities</b>
Research and publication	85	21
Undergraduate teaching	84	34
Administration	81	14
Postgraduate supervision	66	9
Postgraduate teaching	59	13
Community service	52	5
Other	12	4

## **2.6 Sample characteristics: Research activities and funding**

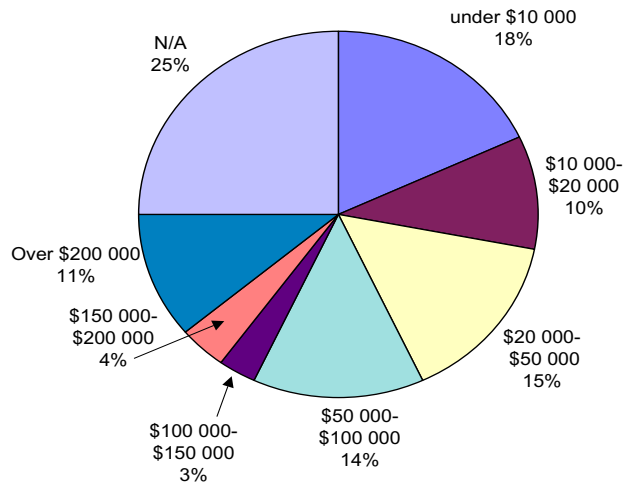
*Source of research funding* The respondents were asked to indicate how their research had been funded in the past four years. A large proportion conducted non-funded research (60%) (see Table 3). The next greatest proportion (46%) was funded through sources internal to their university through competitive application. Other government funding (28%) and ARC (24%) were the next highest sources of funding. Interestingly, both private industry (18%) and sources internal to the university through non-competitive distribution (21%) represented the least used sources of funding. Respondents were then asked to estimate the percentage of total funding that each funding source represented. The results show that non-funded research again formed the greatest percentage of total funding (38%) followed by sources internal to the university through competitive application.

**Table 3 Sources of research funding and estimated average percentage of total funding**

	<b>% sample engaged in funding source over past 4 years</b>	<b>% of total funding</b>
Non-funded research	60	38
Sources internal to Uni – through competitive application	46	18
Other government	28	13
ARC	24	13
Sources internal to Uni – through non- competitive distribution	21	5
Private industry	18	6
Other	10	6

It is important to note that the category of non-funded research does not mean that academics cannot conduct research. Most academics hold teaching and research positions, therefore, some research activities are automatically funded through their time allocation and, their salaries. In many areas of the social sciences and humanities, academics can do useful research with no more than their time and access to a university library.

*Research funding gained in last four years.* Respondents were asked to indicate the amounts of research funding gained in the past four years. The largest proportion in the sample (23%) had not gained research funding, followed by the next largest proportion (17%) who had gained \$10 000 or less in research funds. Thus 40 per cent of the sample had gained little research funding in the past four years. Twenty-nine percent attracted \$20 000 - \$100 000, forming the next greatest proportion and 20 per cent earned over \$100 000 (see Figure 5). Thus, even though many respondents managed to gain research funding, a high proportion of them still undertook non-funded research. As will be seen later in the open-ended items of the questionnaire, many thought that undertaking non-funded research preserved their independence.

**Figure 5. Research funding gained**

*Type of research pursuit.* Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they engaged in different types of research. The largest proportion was concerned with research advancing theory (52%), followed by applied research directed to informing teaching (45%), policy-oriented research (39%), and professional, business, or industry-related research (38%) (see Table 4). Once again, the distribution showed a similar pattern to the larger McInnis study (1999).

**Table 4 Extent of engagement in type of research (%)**

	Not at all (%)	To a minor extent (%)	To a major extent (%)
Research concerned with advancing theory	12	36	52
Research directed to informing your teaching	15	40	45
Policy-oriented research, to assist or inform public or voluntary bodies	29	32	39
Applied professional, or business or industry-related research	29	33	38

## **2.7 Summary of the sample characteristics**

The questionnaire sample in this report was moderately over-represented by females and Level C appointments and under-represented by Level A appointments. The majority of respondents had been working in universities for six years or longer, and nearly all were on continuing appointments. One third of the sample was drawn from Economics/Commerce and Management and then spread fairly evenly across Education, Sociology/Social Science, Media Studies/Communication and Political Science. The Sandstones and Redbricks were more highly represented as compared with the Gumtrees, Unitechs and New Universities. On the whole, the respondents showed a fairly typical work allocation pattern spread between teaching, research and administration. They also tended to conduct non-funded research and research with funding drawn from competitive internal university sources. Respondents also mainly conducted research advancing theory. Although the sample does not match the parameters of the larger population, and therefore, is not representative, it bore some similarities to the parameters of McInnes' much larger study involving 2,609 academics (McInnis 1999).

### 3. Meaning, importance and satisfaction: Respondents' views of academic freedom

This study investigated the meaning and importance of academic freedom for respondents. It also sought their satisfaction with academic freedom in the current environment of commercialisation. The following sections show the results for each of these topics of investigation. They were gathered from respondents' answers to the fixed-choice and open-ended items in the questionnaire and also from commentary in the interviews. This section will be illustrated by quotations from the open-ended responses to the questionnaire in order to show the general tenor and quality of response.

#### 3.1 Meanings of academic freedom

In the questionnaire and interviews, respondents were asked to define what academic freedom meant to them. Respondents generally viewed academic freedom as the right to teach, research and publish contentious issues, to choose their own research colleagues and to feel supported by the institution to speak on social issues in areas of their expertise and without fear or favour. These views were interpreted in terms of three interlinked levels of support for academic freedom. These supports are described in the literature as individual autonomy, collegial autonomy and institutional autonomy (Anderson & Johnson 1998; Meek & Wood 1997; Neave 1988). According to the respondents, academic freedom is primarily experienced at the individual level. It involves the responsible and disciplined exercise of scholarly expertise. Collegial autonomy operates more broadly and concerns the collegial determination of research and teaching standards and intellectual property. Institutional autonomy is broader still, operating within the policy and structural relationships of the university, the higher education system, the government and the relevant external funding bodies. These three supports, operating within a particular funding and policy regime, define the parameters in which academic freedom operates. The following quotation from the questionnaire responses illustrates these three supports for academic freedom,

'First, (academic freedom) means that I should be able to undertake research of my choosing and publish the results without gaining permission from my employer or an external agency. Second, it means that the only constraints on my teaching should be the broadly accepted understandings of academia in general and my field of study in particular. Third, that my employment relationship, including job security, promotion and normal academic benefits, should be unaffected by my personal and scholarly expression.'

*Individual autonomy* The first and most common support for academic freedom mentioned in the responses was that of individual autonomy. The core value expressed in the majority of responses was individual freedom of thought and expression. The comment often repeated in the interviews was 'This is why I became an academic'. Individual autonomy, however, seems to exist within a framework of responsibility, namely an intellectual responsibility to critically analyse events in

teaching and research according to disciplined scholarly standards. The following quotation illustrates the responsible exercise of critical analysis evident throughout the responses.

‘Academic freedom is the ability and right to think and express ideas freely without fear of repression and punishment.’

‘...academic freedom does not mean that I can teach whatever I like, how I like, rather that the constraints are set by collegiality and the commonly accepted standards of scholarly inquiry...’.

*Collegial autonomy* The second support for academic freedom mentioned by the respondents was that of collegial autonomy. This was defined as the collegial control of intellectual processes and products in accordance with democratically determined ethical principles and professional standards. Collegial autonomy was characterised by comprehensive and transparent decision-making in teaching and community service and by the peer review process in research. One respondent defined the collective determination of teaching and research standards in the following way,

‘Autonomous, collegially-based decision-making about curriculum, assessment, educational development, research and community service issues. Transparent mechanisms for resolving disputes about student, academic staff or administrative problems.’

*Institutional autonomy* The third support for respondents was that of institutional autonomy, that is, the provision of a university culture and structure whereby research and teaching could be conducted without interference from vested interests. Five kinds of vested interests were named by the respondents: political, governmental, commercial, ecclesiastical, and interests internal to the university. Respondents viewed as very important the right to be protected in their commitment to publish findings and to teach contentious propositions which may conflict with these vested interests. The following quotation highlights the role of the institution in protecting academics from external political and commercial interference and from internal university interests.

‘Academic freedom means the ability to responsibly pursue intellectual work unencumbered by the economic survival of the university and free from political interference. It also means the freedom to teach responsibly within the confines and in respect of human rights, without political interference and without the necessity to consider the economic implications in terms of direct fiscal income.’

### *The purpose and significance of academic freedom*

The interviews provided further opportunity to explore the meaning of academic freedom and its purpose and significance for respondents. Interview respondents felt that academic freedom is central to their sense of the role and purpose of universities. Respondents also maintained that academic freedom is essential, not only to their job satisfaction and internal motivations to teach and research, but also to enable them to fulfil their social responsibility to students, universities and the community.

Interviewees commonly described academic freedom as a necessary requirement for the free exploration of ideas, the pursuit of knowledge, and advancing students' learning across a broad spectrum of ideas. They maintained that academic freedom is essential to enable social inquiry without fear or favour, which allows academics to comment on and critically speak to social issues and policies that might not otherwise be queried.

Without academic freedom, respondents felt that the generation of ideas and knowledge could be limited to those ideas that were only of economic benefit to society or those supporting particular ideological approaches. Social commentary would be circumscribed and the learning experience of students would be reduced, particularly in terms of the breadth of ideas and knowledge to which they are introduced. Furthermore, without academic freedom, there would be a negative impact on the intellectual creativity and internally motivated productivity of academics themselves.

### **3.2 Importance of different aspects of academic freedom**

Following the open-ended questions about the meaning of academic freedom, questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the importance of specific aspects of academic freedom. The purpose of this was to further explore the meaning of this concept for respondents. The aspects specified were derived from the literature (Vidovich & Currie 1998) and the interviews with key informants prior to the design of the questionnaire. Respondents were also asked to indicate their satisfaction with each aspect. Both dimensions of importance and satisfaction used a rating scale of high, low, moderate or not applicable (N/A). Table 5 shows those aspects rated according to importance and placed in descending order according to percentage ratings. (The satisfaction ratings will be discussed in Section 3.3).

Nearly all of the respondents (92%) considered that the freedom to define research topics and methods and to publish without fear of censorship were of high importance. Most rated the freedom to teach contentious propositions (84%) and the right to choose colleagues for research collaboration (82%) also as high in importance. The interviews and open-ended items in the questionnaire confirmed that these aspects of academic freedom were considered to be essential and, without protection for these fundamental aspects, academic freedom would be directly constrained. A slightly lower proportion of the respondents rated the right to seek peer review (75%), the freedom to determine student standards (75%) and the maintenance of intellectual property rights in research (75%) and in course design and content (61%) as high in importance.

As we noted in Chapter Three, aspects of academic freedom can be interpreted in terms of individual, collegial and institutional autonomy. It was interesting to note in the analysis of Table 5, generally those aspects that were most frequently rated as of high importance appeared to involve individual autonomy. Aspects of individual autonomy seemed to represent the academic as an individual and 'as a scholar', with the freedom and responsibility to think, write and speak without fear or favour. Individual autonomy particularly involved the right to teach and research contentious propositions. Aspects of collegial autonomy represented the academic 'as professional', with the right to collegially determine research and teaching standards



and the ownership of intellectual property. These aspects represented professional considerations that were often disciplinary-based. They were rated as important by fewer of the respondents.

**Table 5 Aspects of academic freedom, rated as high in importance, shown in decreasing order (%).**

Aspects of academic freedom	% rating as high importance
Freedom to define research topics and methods	92
Freedom to publish without fear of censorship	92
Freedom to teach contentious propositions	84
The right to choose colleagues for research collaboration	82
Freedom to determine student standards	75
Maintenance of intellectual property rights in research	75
The right to seek peer review on findings	75
Maintenance of intellectual property rights in course design and content*	61
Freedom from accountability to any source (e.g., professional bodies, ethical guidelines)	30

\* Although Australian copyright law gives intellectual property rights for course materials to employers, there appear to be some differences in the allocation of these rights between universities.

It is also important to note the relatively low percentage of the sample who thought that academic freedom implied lack of accountability to any source (30%). While relatively low, the fact that almost one-third answered in this way appears to contradict other responses in which academics stressed that academic freedom should be matched by academic responsibilities. Thus, clarification was sought in the interviews. All interviewees described academic freedom as operating within the framework of academic responsibility. They defined responsibility as an ethical obligation to students, peers, employer and society in general. The precise nature of the responsibilities varied, but included the responsibility to engage in academic activities ethically and professionally with the aim of producing high quality outcomes. Those respondents who had indicated in the questionnaire that they thought ‘freedom from accountability to any source’ was an important aspect of academic freedom reported a strong sense of academic responsibility.

The explanation for this apparent anomaly lies in the distinction between ‘accountability’ and ‘responsibility’. It became clear during the interviews and the analysis of the open-ended comments in the questionnaire that many interpreted

accountability as an institutional and bureaucratic requirement often involving form-filling. Only some interviewees regarded such activities as improving professional accountability. Responsibility, by contrast, referred to ethical and professional excellence, where academics were responsible to their students and universities for their actions. This finding is also consistent with findings in a related study by Vidovich and Currie (1998) where respondents largely interpreted accountability as an administrative requirement as distinct from professional ethical behaviour.

### **3.3 Respondents' satisfaction with aspects of academic freedom**

The questionnaire sought respondents' satisfaction with particular aspects of academic freedom in their universities. In a fixed choice item of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the above aspects of academic freedom. Table 6 replicates Table 5, but now adds the column detailing the extent to which academics are satisfied with these aspects of academic freedom. Comparisons can thus be made between how important an aspect is to the respondents and how satisfied they are with this aspect.

Most of the respondents were moderately or highly satisfied with those aspects that seemed to concern individual autonomy. Most were moderately to highly satisfied with the freedom to define research topics and methods (88%, 45% high and 43% moderate), the freedom to teach contentious propositions (85%, 50% high and 35% moderate), the right to choose colleagues for research collaboration (82%, 54% high and 28% moderate), and the freedom to publish without fear of censorship (80%, 38% high and 42% moderate).

Table 6 reveals a contrast between the importance and satisfaction data for each aspect of academic freedom. Although nearly all rated these aspects as high in importance, they did not all rate them as highly satisfactory. Approximately one-half of the sample reported high satisfaction with these aspects, with the remainder, for the most part, reporting moderate satisfaction.

Many would argue that academic freedom plays such an essential role in universities, that anything less than high satisfaction with each aspect is unacceptable. Others would argue that as long as academics are at least moderately satisfied, the state of academic freedom is not a major concern. This issue will be addressed further in Chapter Four which reports on respondents' current concern at the state of academic freedom and the extent of deterioration over the past four years.

It should be stated here, however, that the NTEU study found that the work-related factors (see Section 1.3) that were the source of the most stress for academics were institutional and collegial factors (NTEU 2000, p. 35). McInnis also found that the changes in work-practices over the period of his study undermined the quality of both research and teaching (McInnis 1999, p. 63). Referring back to Table 6, most of the respondents were moderately or highly satisfied with some aspects associated with collegial autonomy. Eighty-one per cent of respondents were satisfied with the maintenance of intellectual property rights in research (36% high and 45% moderate) and the right to seek peer review on findings (55% high and 26% moderate). However, there was generally less satisfaction with other aspects of collegial autonomy. Seventy-four per cent were moderately to highly satisfied with the

maintenance of intellectual property rights in course design and content (33% high and 41% moderate), and 70 per cent with the freedom to determine student standards (28% high and 42% moderate).

**Table 6 Importance and satisfaction ratings of aspects of academic freedom (%)**

Aspects of academic freedom	rating of importance %			rating of satisfaction %		
	Low	Mod	High	Low	Mod	High
Freedom to define research topics and methods	1	4	92	11	43	45
Freedom to publish without fear of censorship	1	3	92	16	42	38
Freedom to teach contentious propositions	2	12	84	11	35	50
The right to choose colleagues for research collaboration	2	9	82	10	28	54
Freedom to determine student standards	5	18	75	27	42	28
Maintenance of intellectual property rights in research	5	18	75	13	45	36
The right to seek peer review on findings	2	18	75	11	26	55
Maintenance of intellectual property rights in course design and content	7	31	61	22	41	33

\* The figures in both importance and satisfaction rows do not add up to 100% due to the rounding of some figures and non-response to some of the items.

These latter two items were rated low in satisfaction by more of the sample than all of the other aspects, while also being rated reasonably high in importance. That is, 27 per cent of respondents had low levels of satisfaction with the freedom to determine student standards, although 75 per cent had rated this aspect of high importance. Similarly, 22 per cent of respondents had low levels of satisfaction with the maintenance of intellectual property rights in course design and content, although 61 per cent had rated this aspect of high importance. It was notable though that there was least consensus (61%) about the importance of this latter item.

A test of correlation was conducted between the importance and satisfaction ratings. There was a slight positive relationship between the numbers who rated aspects high in importance as compared with the numbers who rated aspects high in satisfaction,

$r = 0.4$ , ie. if a high number rated an aspect high in importance, then it was likely that a high number would also rate the aspect high in satisfaction. Aspects concerning individual autonomy generally seemed to have higher importance and satisfaction.

### **3.4 Summary**

This chapter explored respondents' understanding of academic freedom, and showed their ratings of its importance and satisfaction. When respondents were asked about the meaning of academic freedom, three interlinked supports could be interpreted from their responses. These comprised individual, and to a lesser extent, collegial and institutional autonomy. Respondents also rated the importance of various aspects of academic freedom. Aspects concerning individual autonomy were rated highly by more of the respondents than collegial aspects. Respondents rated their satisfaction with these same aspects of academic freedom. Most of the respondents were moderately or highly satisfied with those aspects concerning individual autonomy.

Thus, the findings in this chapter indicate moderate or high satisfaction from most of the respondents at least with the aspects concerning individual autonomy. However, they often reported moderate rather than high satisfaction with these aspects. This raises the question of what satisfaction level is appropriate or desirable for aspects of this academic freedom. In addition, this data together with the data presented in the following chapter indicate an apparent discrepancy in the findings. While respondents were moderately or highly satisfied, the next chapter demonstrates that they also expressed concern about the state of academic freedom in their universities. The following chapter reports on respondents' concerns with the state of academic freedom in their universities. It also shows respondents perceive a deterioration that is related to increasing commercialisation.

#### 4. The state of academic freedom in the current environment of commercialisation: levels of concern and change

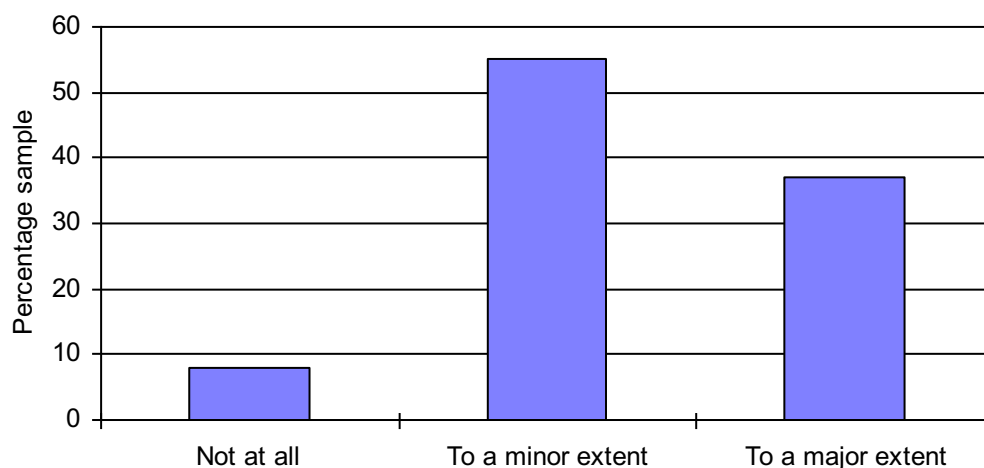
This chapter shows respondents' level of concern about the state of academic freedom in their universities. It also shows their views on improvement or deterioration in the state of academic freedom over the past four years and the perceived relationship between these changes and increasing commercialisation. These topics were examined to see if there were significant differences for university type, level of appointment and type of research.

The chapter further elaborates on the apparent discrepancy presented in Chapter Three. Most of the respondents indicated moderate or high satisfaction with the aspects concerning, at least, individual autonomy in academic freedom. Yet, this chapter reports considerable concern about the state of academic freedom in Australian universities.

##### 4.1 Level of concern about state of academic freedom

One of the items in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the extent of their concern about the state of academic freedom in their university. Ninety-two per cent of respondents reported a degree of concern. Fifty-five per cent of the respondents were concerned to minor extent, while 37 per cent were concerned to a major extent. Only eight per cent reported that they were not at all concerned. Figure 6 shows respondents' level of concern about the state of academic freedom in their university.

**Figure 6. Level of concern about state of academic freedom**



As stated in Section 2.3, in early January 2001, before the third round of questionnaires and final interviews, the study received significant national media attention. A chi square was conducted for the main items in the questionnaire to determine whether the media attention had biased subsequent responses. A chi square

showed no significant differences in the distribution of responses to this question before and after the study received media attention,  $p = 0.2$ .

Further, a comparison of the level of concern about the state of academic freedom across the four institutional types suggested that there was more concern from the Sandstone groupings and least from the Gumtree groupings, although this was not found to be statistically significant,  $p = 0.3$  (see Table 7).

**Table 7 Level of concern about the state of academic freedom according to institutional type (%)**

	Sandstone	Gumtree	Unitech	New Uni	Total
Not at All	6	10	11	7	8
To a Minor Extent	43	66	57	52	53
To a Major Extent	51	24	32	41	39
Total	100	100	100	100	100

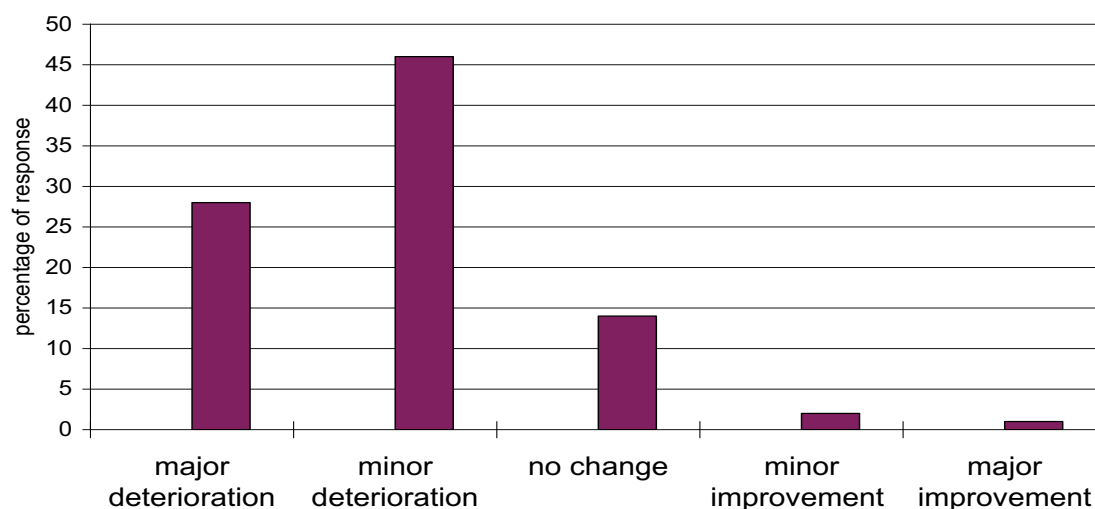
\* Column headings are defined in Section 2.3

Chi square tests were also conducted for comparisons of the different levels of concern across level of appointment and subject/disciplinary classification. These were found to be not significant, for levels of appointment,  $p = 0.13$ , and for subject/disciplinary classifications,  $p = 0.3$ .

#### 4.2 Improvement or deterioration of academic freedom

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked if the state of academic freedom had improved or deteriorated over the past four years. Seventy-three per cent of the sample thought that there had been a deterioration in conditions. Nearly one half of the sample (45%) thought there had been a minor deterioration and over one quarter (28%) thought there had been a major deterioration. Only four respondents (2%) thought that the situation had improved, three to a minor extent and one to a major extent (see Figure 7). A chi square showed no significant difference in the distribution of responses before and after the study received media attention,  $p = 0.6$ .

**Figure 7. Perceived change in state of academic freedom**



At this point, it is important to understand how respondents interpreted the categories of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ as they were completing the question concerning changes in the state of academic freedom over the past four years. Respondents were asked in the follow-up interviews what they understood ‘major’ or ‘minor’ to mean as they were completing this particular question. Generally, they thought that ‘major deterioration’ meant that there would be direct and overt constraints on their ability to teach and research independently, although some mentioned that there might be direct requirements to raise money. By contrast, ‘minor deterioration’ meant that there would be subtle pressures or loss of opportunities reducing their ability to conduct research independently or indeed at all. These were characterised as systemic pressures such as the increase in fee-paying courses which required considerable time spent on developing and marketing courses or applying for external funds. Respondents consistently maintained that these pressures would become unacceptable if they directly constrained individual autonomy.

Some respondents went on to clarify that they felt that changes in the state of academic freedom were not due to the university but to the new financial environment shaped by the Federal Government (see Appendix C, Question 18).

‘The university would rarely, if ever, impose any explicit directions for research, teaching or publication. However, there are structural factors such as the financial need (imposed on us by Federal government funding regimes) to undertake certain types of industry collaborative research which obviously limit the range of theoretical, ideological and methodological approaches with which all parties to the collaboration would be comfortable. It’s important not to overstate this as I have never reported and would never feel under pressure to report results that are at odds with my theoretical and ideological predispositions. However, the array of available research topics has been a little limited.’

In the open-ended item of the questionnaire, some respondents sounded the warning note that both industry and the academy can interfere with academic freedom: industry on political and commercial grounds, the academy on ideological grounds.

‘ ‘Research’ is increasingly defined in terms of bringing in money and ‘friend raising’ in the wider community – which often means tailoring research projects and findings to flatter the funders/friends.’

‘In my area of research (social policy) some positions, including supposedly ‘radical’ positions, have become orthodoxies. Critical debate can actually mean faithfulness to a particular doctrine – be it right or left. I strongly disagree with this approach to academic ‘freedom’. Teachers have a responsibility to inform students of current debates, not demand that students pursue a particular ideological line. Unfortunately in teaching, I think the term academic freedom has become quite twisted and it certainly does not serve students well.’

Chi square tests were also conducted for comparisons of the categories of perceived change in the state of academic freedom across the different university types and

across subject/disciplinary classifications. These were not found to be significant, for institutional type,  $p = 0.14$  (see Table 8) and for subject/disciplinary classifications,  $p = 0.15$ .

**Table 8 Perceived change in state of academic freedom according to institutional type (%)**

	Sandstone (%)	Gumtree (%)	Unitech (%)	New Unis (%)	Total*
Major deterioration	38	23	15	41	30
Minor Deterioration	42	45	59	31	45
No change	11	13	13	10	12
Minor improvement	4	0	3	0	2
Major Improvement	0	0	0	3	1
Don't Know	5	19	10	14	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100

\* Column headings are defined in Section 2.3

A chi square test was conducted for comparisons of the categories of perceived change in the state of academic freedom across the various levels of appointment. These were found to be highly significant,  $p = .005$ . Levels D and E had a higher proportion of no change than Levels B and C, while Levels A and B had a high proportion of 'don't know' (see Table 9). Some Level A appointments stated in the open-ended items in the questionnaire that they felt they did not have the experience to comment on the topic.

**Table 9 Perceived change in state of academic freedom according to level of appointment (%)**

	Level E (%)	Level D (%)	Level C (%)	Level B (%)	Level A (%)	Total*
Major deterioration	14	26	36	25	22	27
Minor Deterioration	43	35	53	41	44	42
No change	43	30	9	8	11	13
Minor improvement	0	0	0	5	0	2
Major Improvement	0	4	0	0	0	1
Don't Know	0	4	2	21	22	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	95

\* Column headings are defined in Section 2.5

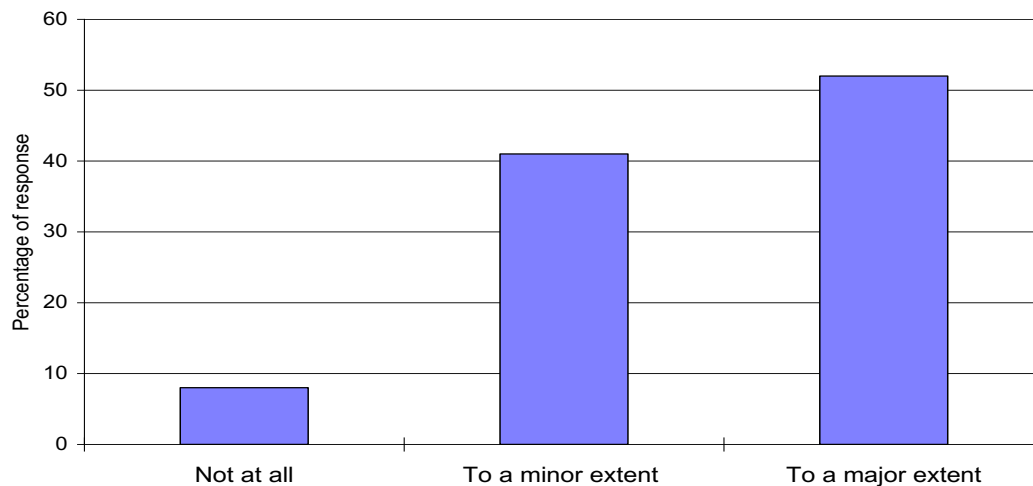
### 4.3 Change related to commercialisation

Respondents were also asked to what extent changes in the state of academic freedom related to increasing commercialisation of their universities. The majority of those who reported a deterioration (81%) thought that these changes related to the increasing commercialisation of their university: 48 per cent to a major extent, and 33



per cent to a minor extent (see Figure 8). A chi square showed no significant difference in the distribution of responses before and after the study received media attention,  $p = 0.9$ .

**Figure 8. Change in academic freedom due to commercialisation**



A chi square test was conducted for comparisons of the categories of perceived change related to commercialisation across the institutional types. This was found to be significant,  $p < 0.05$  (see Table 10). A high proportion of those from the Sandstone and Redbrick universities thought that change was related to commercialisation to a major extent. The Unitechs had the highest proportion of those who thought that changes in the state of academic freedom were not at all related to commercialisation.

This is not a surprising finding because as Marginson and Considine (2000) argue, the Sandstone universities already have a robust academic culture and perhaps do not need to be as entrepreneurial as other types of universities because of their powerful position, history and status. Change related to increasing commercialisation would be most salient in such a culture. By contrast, the Unitechs are marketing-heavy and pride themselves on their history of industry links: they are the most corporate of all the universities. Commercialisation is an established part of their culture and effectiveness (Marginson & Considine 2000).

**Table 10 Change related to increasing commercialisation according to institutional type (%)**

	Sandstone	Gumtree	Unitech	New Unis	Total*
Not at All	4	0	15	3	6
To a minor Extent	29	45	35	31	34
To a Major Extent	55	32	33	52	44
No response	13	23	18	14	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100

\* Column headings are defined in Section 2.3

Chi square tests were also conducted for comparisons of the categories of perceived change related to commercialisation across the various levels of appointment and subject disciplinary classifications. For levels of appointment this was not significant,  $p = 0.4$ ; but for subject disciplinary classifications, this was significant,  $p < 0.05$ . Political Scientists were the most likely to believe that the deterioration of academic freedom was due to commercialisation; while respondents from Education were least likely to believe that the change was due to deterioration (see Table 11).

**Table 11 Change related to increasing commercialisation according to subject/disciplinary classification (%)**

	Education	Sociology	Pol Sci	Eco/Com	Media & Communication	Management	Other	Total
Not at All	19	0	0	8	0	11	8	8
To a minor Extent	57	40	12	46	42	44	33	40
To a Major Extent	24	60	88	46	58	44	58	53
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

#### 4.4 An apparent discrepancy between satisfaction and concern

As stated at the end of the preceding chapter, an apparent discrepancy emerged between the findings on respondents' satisfaction with academic freedom and their level of concern. While respondents were generally satisfied with many of the specific aspects of academic freedom examined in the survey, they felt some degree of concern and perceived deterioration in the overall state of academic freedom in their universities. One explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the satisfaction and concern findings is that respondents were focusing on different levels when answering different questions. In the questions about their levels of satisfaction with specific aspects of academic freedom, it seems likely that respondents were focusing primarily on their personal and direct experience of individual autonomy. Few had experienced direct interference in research and teaching and therefore felt satisfied. In contrast, when asked about their overall level of concern with the state of academic freedom within their universities, it seems likely that they focused more on the systemic effects of commercialisation because this is their perception of the general tenor of the commercialised environment.

This explanation is supported by noting the qualification in responses that repeatedly emerged from the open-ended item in the questionnaire. This item asked respondents to elaborate on their level of satisfaction with academic freedom. Whilst respondents generally indicated that they were satisfied with aspects of individual autonomy, they consistently replied that they were concerned about systemic or indirect effects, the

continuation of which could ultimately affect individual autonomy. This theme is illustrated below.

‘Overall I am reasonably satisfied with my levels of academic freedom and cannot identify any explicit attempts to undermine my ability to pursue my research interests. Nevertheless, there are a number of developments here and...many funding pressures and increased workloads are already cutting into research time...changes in research funding and the increased focused on industry partnerships seem to have already impacted on the sets of questions that academics around me are researching. Third and most significant, changes in university management structures...have had a considerable impact on the expression of academic freedom...’

One interviewee illustrated the relationship between the different levels of autonomy as a situation similar to a ‘House of Cards’. If one is taken out, ultimately all cards will fall down and from this perspective, it was ‘bad sociology’ to emphasise individual autonomy without its collegial and institutional supports.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter reports on respondents’ level of concern about the state of academic freedom in their universities. Ninety-two per cent of respondents reported a degree of concern, and over one-third were concerned to a major extent. Seventy-three per cent of the sample thought that there had been a deterioration in academic freedom over the past four years and the majority of those who reported a deterioration (81%) thought that these changes related to the increasing commercialisation of their university.

Not surprisingly, given their history and academic culture, a high proportion of those from the Sandstone and Redbrick universities thought that change was related to commercialisation to a major extent. Change related to increasing commercialisation would be most salient in such a culture. Also not surprising, given that commercialisation is an established part of their culture, was the finding that the Unitechs had the highest proportion of those who thought that changes in the state of academic freedom were not at all related to commercialisation.

Thus, while the preceding chapter reported on moderate and high satisfaction with specified aspects of academic freedom, this chapter shows respondents’ overwhelming concern about its state, and its deterioration over the past four years. One explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the satisfaction and concern findings is that respondents were focusing on different levels when answering different questions. In the questions about their levels of satisfaction with specific aspects of academic freedom, it seems likely that respondents were focusing primarily on their personal and direct experience of individual autonomy. In contrast, when asked about their overall level of concern with the state of academic freedom within their universities, it seems likely that they focused more on collegial and institutional autonomy because this is their perception of the general tenor of the commercialised environment.

The following chapter shows the meaning and experience of commercialisation, elaborating on the issues that have been raised about the systemic effects of commercialisation.

## 5. The meaning and experience of commercialisation

This chapter outlines the extent to which respondents had particular experiences that may be associated with commercialisation. It also describes the themes that emerged repeatedly from the data detailing the systemic effects of commercialisation. The first section outlines the questionnaire responses to fixed choice items and the second section elaborates further on these responses by drawing on the open-ended responses and interview data. Before beginning however, it is necessary to outline respondents' common understanding of the definition of commercialisation.

### 5.1 Meaning of commercialisation

Although respondents' perceptions of commercialisation were not directly investigated in the questionnaire, the definition of commercialisation was a key component of the key informant and follow-up interviews. Respondents in these interviews uniformly described commercialisation as the marketing of academic work; that is, the sale of academic expertise to provide funding for higher education institutions. They thought that this definition, of necessity, involved the attachment of a market value to research and teaching. According to respondents, commercialisation was the result of reduced governmental funding and created a new openness to privatisation and competition within universities.

### 5.2 The experience of particular aspects of commercialisation

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to identify the extent to which they had had particular experiences that might be associated with commercialisation. The possible experiences listed were derived from the literature and from interviews with key informants prior to the design of the questionnaire.

Table 12 below presents data on a range of possible experiences listed in the questionnaire. The items are ordered according to the three inter-related supports of academic freedom – individual, collegial and institutional – as defined by the respondents and outlined in Chapter 3. The first three items in Table 12 address the individual dimension of academic freedom and the freedom to publish and speak without fear or concern for any direct personal repercussions. The next two items address collegial dimensions which enable academics to choose research colleagues without the constraint of external influence or interference. The next five items address institutional issues in relation to both research and teaching. The final two items are also institutional in nature, but these address the extent to which the relationships between university and society have been changed by commercialisation, particularly in the case of industry and competitive funding agencies.

*Individual dimensions* In relation to individual autonomy, 83 percent of respondents reported that they had not been prevented from publishing contentious research results, whilst 17 per cent reported that they had experienced this either to a minor (12%) or major (5%) extent. Given that respondents rated this dimension as high in importance, the fact that 17 per cent reported that they had been prevented from publishing contentious results should be noted.

**Table 12 The effects of commercialisation**

	% ratings		
	Not at all	To a minor extent	To a major extent
Being prevented from publishing contentious results	83	12	5
Discomfort with publishing contentious research results	59	28	13
Reluctance to criticise institutions that provide large research grants or other forms of support	51	33	16
Inhibition about sharing ideas with colleagues for reasons of commercial-in-confidence information	62	29	9
An increasing atmosphere of competition among colleagues	15	34	51
Changes to research focus because of possible lack of funding	23	42	35
Reduced research time due to writing grant applications and tenders	15	32	53
Emphasis on funded research over un-funded research within your university	5	23	72
Valuing of courses that attract full fee-paying students over other courses within your university	12	38	50
Valuing of courses that attract high student enrolments over other courses within your university	9	27	64
Cross-fertilisation of ideas through interaction with industry and government sectors	33	45	22
Enhancement of the quality of research through interaction with external funding bodies	52	34	14

Forty-one per cent reported that they had experienced discomfort with publishing contentious research results (13% to a major extent) and 49 per cent reported that they had experienced a reluctance to criticise institutions that provide large research grants or other forms of support (16% to a major extent). The data do not tell us whether this reluctance is due to a fear of retribution, or to a sense of loyalty to their university. However for one in two academics a commercial relationship between their university and a funding body places constraints on their freedom to criticise the organisations on whom their university depends.

*Collegial dimensions* In relation to matters of collegial autonomy, 85 per cent of respondents had experienced an increase in competition between colleagues, with just over half (51%) experiencing this to a major extent. Thirty eight per cent of respondents had experienced restrictions on sharing ideas with colleagues due to commercial-in-confidence arrangements. In the interviews, some respondents commented on the increased relevance and focus of research that arises from competition and others, the isolation and low morale that resulted from collegial

competition.

*Institutional dimensions* Ninety-five per cent of respondents experienced an emphasis on funded over unfunded research in their university and 72 per cent had experienced this to a major extent. Ninety-one per cent had experienced the greater value placed on courses that attract high student enrolments (64% to a major extent) and that attract fee-paying students (88%, 50% to a major extent). Eighty-five per cent reported a reduced amount of research time due to writing grant applications and tenders (53 % to a major extent) and 77 per cent had experienced a change in the choice of research project (42% to a major extent).

Respondents cited benefits arising from commercialisation, particularly in relation to forging closer ties with the non-academic world. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents felt that commercialisation had led to cross-fertilisation of ideas and 48 per cent felt that the quality of their research had been enhanced. As section 5.5 will show, some respondents and interviewees commented positively about commercialisation, seeing considerable benefit in breaking down ideological and hierarchical disciplinary and collegial structures which had previously restricted freedom of ideas and the freedom to conduct research in applied areas.

The following section outlines respondents' perception of direct interference in research and teaching. It is followed by an analysis of the systemic effects of commercialisation drawing heavily on qualitative data in the questionnaire and interviews.

### **5.3 Direct interference in research and teaching**

The fixed choice and open-ended items in the questionnaire investigated the extent of direct interference in respondents' research and teaching. As shown by Table 12, 17 per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced restriction of their freedom to publish contentious research results, leaving 83 per cent who had not had this experience. This result is consistent with other findings in Table 6 which showed that 88 per cent of respondents had some level of satisfaction with their freedom to define research topics and methods (43% moderate; 45% high) and 80 per cent with their freedom to publish without fear of censorship (42% moderate; 38% high). A small number of respondents reported details of direct interference in the open-ended items of the questionnaire – four cases of industry interference were reported, two of government interference and one of university interference (see Appendix C Question 16).

This data indicates that while direct interference is not commonly experienced, a small but not insignificant proportion of respondents have experienced this type of interference. How serious this is requires investigation and how much interference is acceptable is a matter for public debate. On the one hand it could be argued that any interference in these areas is a major concern and that tolerance of such interference may lead to a 'slippery slope' where interference becomes commonplace. On the other hand it could be argued that as long as interference is occurring rarely, then it is not a major concern. Data from this study, however, indicate that respondents tend to opt for the former, rather than the latter, view. When asked in interview how much deterioration in academic freedom is acceptable, respondents generally maintained

that no deterioration is acceptable. Moreover, as detailed in Chapter Three, when asked to indicate what they interpreted the category ‘major deterioration’ to mean, interviewees interpreted ‘major deterioration’ as the existence of direct constraints on their ability to teach and research independently (see discussion, p. 30). Combined with the high level of importance that respondents placed on freedom from direct interference, it is reasonable to conclude that, for this group of academics at least, any degree of direct interference is considered to be unacceptable.

The following section elaborates on the systemic effects of commercialisation on academic freedom. This section will be followed by respondents’ sense of the perceived positive effects of commercialisation.

#### **5.4 Systemic effects of commercialisation on academic freedom**

As previously stated, whilst respondents showed moderate or high satisfaction with most aspects of academic freedom, they also expressed concern about the state of academic freedom, and a sense of deterioration over the past four years. This sense of concern was clarified in the interview data as well as the open-ended data from the questionnaire item asking respondents to elaborate on their experience of commercialisation. Respondents were concerned about the systemic effects of commercialisation on academic freedom. This section explores and analyses these concerns, citing the major themes that emerged from these responses. These themes are presented in decreasing order of the frequency with which they were presented by the respondents in the interviews and open-ended items of the questionnaire.

*Increased workloads, arising from additional commercial research and teaching activities, were reducing academics’ independent research time*

Considerable amounts of time were required for research and teaching activities that were related to commercialisation. Pressures to attract industry-funded research and fee-paying students meant that academics were writing competitive tenders (with low success rates) and developing and marketing courses. These activities were in addition to academics’ normal duties and added to stress levels and a lack of research productivity. Respondents felt that constant competing pressures arising from commercialisation robbed academics of valuable time to reflect and to explore their scholarly interests. Thus, commercialisation was seen as reducing academics’ research time and diverting scholarly focus (see Appendix C, Questions 13 and 16).

‘Importantly, however, is the diminished freedom to get research done at all due to the vast amounts of time spent in administration (which I constantly have pushed upon me) and being a spruiker for the university to get industry money, writing funding proposal (which I have a poor chance of winning and so is largely unproductive work). I often feel that our profession is a shell and a joke, and that we are all wasting our time. At the heart of our work is challenge to the status quo but doing so means you will be punished.’

‘To exercise one’s academic freedom, one must also have the time to undertake the necessary activity. I think a major part of what is occurring at present is not so much an explicit restriction of academic freedom but an implicit (and equally effective) restriction of it by



swamping academics with so much teaching and administration that they don't have time to exercise their freedom.'

*The pressure to engage in attracting research funding from industry increasingly channelled academic effort into 'safe, well defined' areas of research, rather than speculative ones*

Respondents thought that the pressure to conduct industry-funded and commission-based research projects indirectly constrained academic freedom. Industry-funded research altered the type of research that some academics conducted and the sets of questions that they researched. There was a tendency to conduct research that did not challenge the status quo and in those cases where researchers were funded to conduct contentious research, some felt reluctant to publish results that were at odds with the vested interests of industry or commissioning agents. In a small number of cases (approximately 5%), there were direct industry pressures to give the 'right' results or not to publish at all (see Appendix C, Questions 13 and 18).

'Both research and research/teaching formulae are now such that ... industry-collaborative research or consultancy by all academic staff are strongly advised. Only some types of social science research are appropriate for these time-consuming and highly competitive forms of funding, and this effectively restricts the types of research that are deemed acceptable.'

'For me, the most critical issue in academic freedom has been the accessibility of money to ask awkward and unsettling questions, or to pursue 'applied' research for community interests who are unable to pay for commissioned research consultancies. ... This means that innovative, controversial or unconventional research is automatically knocked out of contention. This underfunding of new styles of research is a constraint on academic freedom. As a direct result, I have faced the dilemmas of how to apply industry-related funding to community-focused goals.'

'The main problem has been the lack of opportunity for publishing results that are not welcome to government and an inability to attract funding for projects that are contentious. Independent, funded, research possibilities are extremely scarce and getting worse with the new emphasis on finding a private sector or government partner.'

*The emphasis on fee-based courses furthered disciplines that were vocational, rather than speculative and critical, and sometimes redirected academics' teaching focus to areas that were tangential to academics' expertise*

Many respondents mentioned that commercial pressures were causing universities to value courses that attracted funds. As a consequence, vocational courses in business/management were favoured over those of a critical or speculative nature, with social or public educational value such as gender studies and social theory. Approximately five per cent specifically commented on changes to teaching content to attract full fee paying students (see Appendix C, Question 16). Respondents reported changing their own teaching focus and content to attract funding (in the open-ended items, approximately 8%). Others taught in areas that were not within their area of expertise. Many commented that these changes diluted scholarly strength

and eroded the intellectual capital base on which universities were built (see Appendix C, Question 16).

‘I have had to re-invent myself several times to survive in a Business Faculty. Industrial Relations is not in vogue, so I moved to Employment Relations. Now it is HR and e-business. It is getting very silly but if you do not alter your teaching and your research focus to reflect the latest wave of academic trendiness, you will get left behind. Up till now, being left behind just meant you do not attract funding or internal support or promotion but it is getting much more serious now.’

*The drive to market flexible fee-based courses, particularly on-line courses and distance packages, challenged academics’ ownership of intellectual material*

Respondents thought that commercialisation was driving universities to market and deliver their courses in diverse and flexible modes, through technological changes such as online learning and distance packages. They felt that these developments seriously challenged the intellectual ownership of academic knowledge. Indeed, a small number of academics reported that they had had courses sold without permission.

‘Externalisation and on-lining impacts on what can be taught – tail wagging dog in that the medium controls the message. Original work also gets swallowed up in the production of teaching material on-line. Some consultancies – for government departments for instance, may assume ownership over original work, with or without any acknowledgment.’

*The emphasis on fee-based courses, in particular for domestic and international students, was thought to undermine teaching standards*

Many respondents commented that their universities were giving greater value to courses that attracted full-fee paying students over other courses. Some also suggested that universities were changing so that students’ ability to pay was more important than their ability to pass. Some were concerned that student standards were being lowered, as a consequence, and that student demand rather than academic and collegial considerations, played a strong role in determining teaching quality. Approximately 5 per cent mentioned that they had experienced pressures to admit and to pass full fee paying students (see Appendix C, Question 16).

‘I am disillusioned by the fact that the university is more interested in attracting full-fee paying students but unwilling to invest on upgrading the necessary infrastructure (such as hiring more competent staff members and providing better computer facilities) for these students.’

‘I am not averse in principle to the increase in FFP students, particularly from overseas. In my view, there has been deterioration in standards as a result.’

*The emphasis on 'market' demand required more corporate management structures in universities, which, in turn, compromised collegial decision-making structures*

Respondents reported that increasing levels of university administration are now needed to marshal the university's commercial effort. Top-down decision making is a growing characteristic of university functioning. Reduced control over decision making added substantially to respondents' demoralisation and raised questions about the public function of universities. Further commercialisation encourages an increasing atmosphere of competition between colleagues, to secure industry funding, and between universities, to secure student places.

'I believe that the commercialisation of universities undermines the purpose of universities as autonomous entities which can provide critical commentary and innovation for social change for the better. Courses have been dropped because they are perceived as not as popular, research focus has changed etc. If one has to chase the research dollar, why not do it in private enterprise and at least be paid more appropriately?? Rhetorical comment, but the point is: what is a university for? Job training? nothing more? Getting money from industry?'

Many implied that collegiality, as a result, was compromised.

'Well, the universities are no longer communities of scholars but institutions which are aiming to satisfy rather undefined and unexplored market needs. This will inevitably constrain freedom of inquiry often in non-transparent and non-coercive ways. No one is going to censor or force us to do anything. We'll simply do the censoring ourselves trying to keep abreast of the market demands.'

## **5.5 Positive effects of commercialisation**

While there were systemic effects from commercialisation, some had experienced direct positive effects. From fixed choice questionnaire items shown in Table 12, some respondents had experienced, to a major extent, cross-fertilisation of ideas (22%) and enhancement of the quality of their research (14%) through interaction with external funding bodies. In the interviews and open-ended items of the questionnaire, those respondents who were positive thought that commercialisation created greater accountability, industry relevance and better research performance. They also thought that it counteracted subservience to academic ideology. Some thought that collaboration with industry and government improved the quality of research by forcing academics to apply their research to 'real world' problems. They thought applied research ultimately would enhance academics' research profiles. Some social scientists were weary of rigid ideological stances within the academy and welcomed a fresh perspective from the outside. A small number of respondents were very positive about the opportunities arising from commercialisation.

'... I believe that my research profile and outcomes are much stronger than they would otherwise be because of the pressures upon me to produce research that is relevant for the industries – social service industries – to which my research contributes. For too long in my field there has been a major split between the views of academics and those

who are in the position of practically applying ideas in the field (eg., social service managers, policy makers and practitioners). I feel that the new research imperatives are forcing us to ‘get real’ – this has its limitations and its benefits.’

Others saw collegial competition arising from commercialisation as a form of ‘friendly rivalry’ that had the potential to dramatically improve academics’ combined research performance. They also welcomed commercialisation as a chance to break down elitist barriers in society, in order to assist academics to make their work more relevant to the society at large. They argued for a stronger and more direct practical contribution to society.

‘There is a huge reserve of interest, desire for analysis and explanation in Australian industry – work we should have been doing for decades. The idea of the Public Intellectual needs reviving: both professionals and ordinary community members are mopping up University contributions, both for direct industry application, and purely for the sake of ideas.’

Respondents saw that the pressure to gain funded industry-related research had sparked innovative responses from academics in universities.

‘I think we are talking about very subtle processes. There is a definite pressure to get external funding. The greater amount of funding that appears to be available for SPIRT grants is an example of this – the higher success rate has definitely encouraged me to consider various possibilities here and to keep my eye open for productive collaborations. This is not because I think such research is necessarily what I want to do – although it could be worthwhile – but mainly because of the funding advantages. Whilst this may fit into the definition of ‘commercialisation’ there are many aspects of it which defy this as well. For example, the opportunities to collaborate with government departments and the community sector have produced some interesting results amongst my colleagues. Not that the community sector has much money, but it is interesting to see how SPIRT grants can be used in imaginative ways that resist their industrial-cum-commercial bias and that also play around with the definition of financial collaboration.’

## **5.6 Strategies and structures that assisted respondents to maintain academic freedom**

The questionnaire asked respondents to name any personal strategies or university structures that assisted them in maintaining academic freedom. The following list of strategies and structures is presented in decreasing frequency of response.

*Build a strategic network of supportive colleagues.*

The major strategy used by respondents was to develop relationships and support both internal and external to their universities (29%, see Appendix C, Question 14). By acting together with colleagues to make joint funding proposals, and undertake joint research and by consulting with colleagues, they managed to sustain academic freedom. Colleagues who were both internal and

external to the university were often mentioned. Departmental colleagues were particularly helpful. Many spoke about the key role of the Head of School and Head of Department in mentoring academic freedom in research. Others spoke of external agencies, publishers and disciplinary colleagues overseas.

‘... by developing good relations with external NGO’s and publishers who actually have more interest in my area of research than most of the people I work with.’

‘Seek high support from outside bodies and groups which reduces the impact of potential internal censorship/control. Seek support via international networks.’

#### *Avoid commercially funded projects*

The next strategy used by respondents (14%, see Appendix C, Question 14) is to avoid commercially funded research altogether. These respondents preferred to pursue independent research unfunded so that they could maintain academic freedom. The fact that so many respondents reported that they were engaging in this particular strategy is of some concern. Assuming that promotional criteria will, for the foreseeable future, include the ability of academics to attract funding for their universities, it is likely that for this group of respondents attempts to maintain academic freedom will result in career consequences. Avoiding commercially funded research also reduced the Department’s earning potential.

‘...Once I was involved in a very, very large industrial research project, and found ten years after the project was finished that the source of funds – an enormous company – had made the money available to enhance their political aims. This came as a great shock to me. But I was young then. From that point on I decided that I would no longer do research in a large group run by someone high in university circles.’

‘I, and I believe all of my colleagues, choose to do or not to do whatever type of research that we wish to do. However, to the extent that we do not do research that attracts competitive external funding, we limit Departmental funding and threaten our viability. This obviously and unfortunately leads to undertaking less interesting but better funded projects. Importantly it also pushes research in directions where significant funding is available and away from areas of greater social need where it is not.’

#### *Assistance in negotiating contracts and publishing*

Many respondents consult with research service offices within their university to assist with upfront negotiation of contractual obligations to protect intellectual ownership of material or data (12%, see Appendix C, Question 14). Others recommended educational workshops and departmental seminars to help with this process.

‘Negotiating publishing rights (if possible) at contract; assistance in negotiation provided by senior academic staff; attempting to retain

sufficient latitude and flexibility in contracts (ie. objectives/outcomes and methodology) to secure space and legitimacy for serendipitous research and potentially contentious findings; the establishment of project reference groups whose membership both satisfies the funding agency and potentially provides some protection from subsequent interference; involving and exposing as many independent stakeholders as possible in and to the research process so as to secure a degree of ownership of, and commitment to, the research outcomes beyond the funding agency.'

### *No strategies*

It is important to note that a number had no strategies at all to assist in maintaining academic freedom (11%, see Appendix C, Question 14). They simply answered 'none' or 'no strategy at all' although a small number felt that university assistance was not useful.

### *Other strategies*

A number of other strategies were suggested but these were mentioned singly. One thought that publishing books protects status and 'people leave you alone'; another that keeping a low profile enabled independence. Some thought that working efficiently and getting outcomes in a range or areas would help and others avoided ideology-based journals. Finally, one respondent calmly wrote that s/he had changed work practices. The comment is, in itself, commentary on a calm adaptation to circumstances.

'There has been a lot of background noise, over that last two decades, calling for increasing commercialisation, corporatisation, increasing class sizes, and so on. But all this has not affected me greatly. True, my classes and student numbers are huge now, but I have adjusted my modes of work to process the piles of paper work more efficiently. Increasingly, my students assess their own papers and reports, but not completely, I still monitor the process. For myself, nothing touches my four hours a day for personal reading and writing: between 3.30 am. and 7.30 am., 365 days a year. This provides abundant time for reading and writing uninterrupted.'

## **5.7 Summary**

This chapter reported on respondents' understanding and experience of commercialisation and the strategies that they used to maintain academic freedom in an environment of commercialisation. Respondents uniformly described commercialisation as the marketing of academic work, that is, the sale of academic expertise to provide funding for higher education institutions. Overt interference in relation to individual freedom to publish contentious research results was not widespread, although some had experienced this type of interference. There was also some discomfort with publishing contentious research results and almost half had experienced a reluctance to criticise institutions that provided financial support for their universities.

Respondents were concerned about the systemic effects of commercialisation on academic freedom. It was clear from this data that:

- Government pressures for universities to develop alternative sources of income through commercialisation were interacting to create work overload and to reduce independent research time. The trend towards commercial activities meant that academics spent considerable amounts of time writing competitive tenders and developing and marketing commercial courses, in addition to their normal workload.
- The pressure to engage in attracting research funding from industry increasingly channelled academic effort into 'safe, well defined', rather than speculative areas of research.
- The emphasis on fee-based courses furthered disciplines that were vocational, rather than speculative and critical, and sometimes redirected academics' teaching focus to areas that were tangential to academics' expertise.
- The drive to market flexible fee-based courses, particularly on-line courses and distance packages, challenged academics' ownership of intellectual material.
- The emphasis on fee-based courses, in particular for domestic and international postgraduates, was thought to undermine teaching standards.
- The emphasis on 'market' demand required more corporate management structures in universities, which, in turn, compromised collegial decision-making structures.

On the positive side some had experienced the cross-fertilisation of ideas and enhancement of the quality of their research through interaction with external funding bodies. Respondents suggested a number of strategies to maintain academic freedom. These were mainly: to build a supportive network of colleagues; to avoid commercially funded research projects; to seek assistance in negotiating contracts and publishing.

## 6. Summary and conclusions

This study has outlined respondents' experiences of academic freedom in Australian universities in an environment of commercialisation. In this environment universities are increasingly required to seek funding from sources other than governments. These changes have brought about the expansion of fee-based courses for international and domestic students, attracting research funds from industry, the sale of consulting and other university services; and a new corporate style of university management. However, the effects of commercialisation on academic freedom go beyond simply identifying the increased and direct commercial activities by universities, as these activities are structured by the policy incentives and structural parameters in the new competitive environment.

Academic freedom was generally understood by respondents as an individual right to:

- teach, research and publish contentious issues;
- choose their own research colleagues; and
- speak on social issues without fear or favour in areas of their expertise.

Respondents also stressed that this right was balanced by the responsible and disciplined exercise of scholarly expertise. Some respondents also stressed that these aspects of individual academic freedom could only operate with the supports of collegial and institutional autonomy.

This study found first, that direct interference with individual academics' teaching, research and publication activities was not widespread although 17 per cent reported being prevented from publishing contentious results, 12 per cent to a minor extent and 5 per cent to a major extent. Secondly, nearly all respondents rated the individual aspects of academic freedom as highly important. Most were moderately or highly satisfied with these individual aspects. Further, in contrast with the importance ratings, satisfaction was often reported as moderate rather than high. Thirdly, most respondents reported a level of concern and deterioration in their academic freedom due to commercialisation over the last four years. Fourthly, it was found that commercialisation has produced substantial systemic effects on respondents experience of academic freedom. These findings add to the debate between government, industry, universities and academics about the directions commercialisation is taking higher education in Australia and the place of academic freedom in this environment.

While respondents expressed some satisfaction at the individual level, they also expressed dissatisfaction with the way that systemic effects of commercialisation are beginning to undermine academic freedom:

- Government pressures for universities to develop alternative sources of income through commercialisation were interacting to create work overload and to reduce independent research time. The trend towards commercial activities meant that academics spent considerable amounts of time writing competitive tenders and developing and marketing commercial courses, in addition to their normal workload.



- The pressure to engage in attracting research funding from industry increasingly channelled academic effort into ‘safe, well defined’ areas of research, rather than speculative ones.
- The emphasis on fee-based courses benefited disciplines that were vocational, rather than speculative and critical, and sometimes redirected academics’ teaching focus to areas that were tangential to academics’ expertise.
- The drive to market flexible fee-based courses, particularly on-line courses and distance packages, challenged academics’ ownership of intellectual material.
- The emphasis on fee-based courses, in particular for domestic and international postgraduates, was thought to undermine teaching standards.
- The emphasis on ‘market’ demand required more corporate management structures in universities, which, in turn, compromised collegial decision-making structures.

These findings raise the question of how academic freedom can be maintained in Australian universities today. Many social scientists in this study expressed the view that academic freedom is essential to the role of universities as an important and independent source of social enquiry. The freedom to be constructively and responsibly critical without fear or favour is central to this role. Yet, government is providing incentives for universities to play a more direct role in responding to industry needs and to demonstrate direct economic benefits to Australian society (DETYA 2000, p.3; Howard 2001). This produces a tension between the public role of universities and their economic viability. Questions about how aspects of academic freedom are affected by commercialisation link into the larger debate about the appropriate role of universities and academics in contemporary Australia (e.g. see Coaldrake and Stedman 1999; Marginson 1997b; Marginson & Considine 2000; Martin 1999, Taylor 1999).

### *The nature of the public university*

The changes in the university sector in recent years have stimulated a public debate about the identity and purpose of universities in contemporary Australia. What is a university for? How does university research and teaching differ from other forms of private Research and Development (R&D), or other forms of post-secondary education or training? At the heart of the distinction between a public university in Australia and more commercial forms of research and teaching lies the idea of academic freedom and the public good.

Without a history of private universities with their necessary supporting elements of philanthropy, endowments and community support, the introduction of commercial funding arrangements into Australian universities needs to be carefully managed to ensure the maintenance of core values. A large number of respondents in this study reported an increasing reliance on private sources of funding which undermined academic freedom. According to this group at least, the idea of academic freedom remains a core and essential value to their work as professional academics, and that these values are threatened by current commercialisation arrangements.

### *The production of knowledge*

This study found that seeking, teaching and speaking on contentious issues without fear or favour is central to the professional identity of these individual social scientists and is also a key motivating factor for their entering, and remaining in, academia. Respondents commented on how the restructuring of universities, the multiplication of courses, and the intensification of links to industry and business were challenging the values of academic freedom. Meeting the requirements of funded research is perceived as limiting the type of knowledge that is generated by academics, and, in particular, channelling research into safe, rather than speculative, areas. These findings have implications for not just the quantity but also the nature of academic output.

What limitations should there be on the areas of knowledge being investigated? How crucial is the role of academic freedom in generating knowledge and in investigating social issues in an independent way? How serious a threat is the economic valuing of knowledge production to the significant social and cultural values of the university as knowledge producers?

The production of knowledge as a commercial enterprise appears also to be challenging the intellectual ownership of academic knowledge. The construction of knowledge as a commodity is closely linked with these processes and is a point about which respondents and interviewees expressed concern at the deterioration of their academic freedom. While some respondents were in a position of strength to negotiate change others were undermined by their poor market position or lack of opportunity.

### *Supporting academic freedom*

Historically, the idea of academic freedom has been supported and protected by a range of institutional structures and administrative arrangements. However, with the changes to the way universities operate, these supporting structures are also undergoing change. The structures and processes prevalent in the 'public' university may be increasingly irrelevant to the nature of contemporary academic work and new ways of organising academic work may be required in a competitive environment. What is of concern is how, if at all, in the process of dismantling and replacing old structures sufficient account has been taken of how to protect core values of university education and research.

Many respondents in this study suggested that the value of academic freedom has, to some extent, been eroded. Changing structures have not adequately incorporated ways to ensure the protection of independent inquiry and responsibility for academic freedom appears to be left largely in the hands of individual academics. This is demonstrated by the majority of respondents who expressed concern about the state of academic freedom and who perceived a deterioration of academic freedom that is largely due to commercialisation.

A key question for public debate, therefore, is whether academic freedom is to remain a core value of the university sector. If, as for the respondents in this study, the

answer is ‘yes’, then it is important to develop new systems designed to support and protect academic freedom. These may include:

- recognising the investment of intellectual capital contained in all subject/disciplinary areas;
- incorporating schools and departments in institutional decision-making;
- developing performance measures for the values of academic freedom that carry equal weight with commercial performance measures;
- including explicit statements about the importance of academic freedom in university mission statements, procedural documents and rules and/or governing legislation;
- developing protocols regarding what external funding agents can request or demand from academics;
- creating administrative systems that support academics’ negotiation of commercial contracts;
- putting in place mechanisms for the protection of whistleblowers; and
- the introduction of protocols to guide the determination of student standards and to maintain quality in fee-paying courses.

#### *Further research*

As an exploratory study of a complex topic, this study has raised more questions than it has answered. Further research is required of at least the following issues:

- the representativeness of this study in relation to all social scientists and/or academics from other disciplinary areas;
- more detailed study in relation to differences across university types;
- more detailed study of the interrelationship between individual, collegial and institutional autonomy; and
- whether academic freedom is enhanced or impeded by commercialisation.

The fact that a proportion of respondents indicated that they felt positive about commercialisation suggests that commercialisation is not necessarily detrimental to academic freedom. Respondents commented that closer links to industry, business and the community provided focus, relevance and real world applications for their teaching and research. The focus of criticism was that the current methods of undertaking commercialisation isolates academics and removes the supports for valuable academic activity. Without an informed understanding of the implications of commercialisation academic freedom may be eroded in this new funding regime.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Key informant questions

1. What do you understand by academic freedom? Is academic freedom a relevant/important concept for you in teaching and in research? What are the aspects of academic freedom?
2. What do you understand by commercialisation? What are the aspects of commercialisation? If you had free access to the funding that you desired, would your research be different? If so, how? How important is commercialisation to current and future university functioning?
3. How satisfied are you with academic freedom in the current context of commercialisation? Give examples of your teaching and research where you exercised academic freedom in the context of commercialisation? and where you feel it has been constrained?
4. How have the values of academic freedom been affected by university structures and processes of decision-making?

## Appendix B

### Survey questionnaire



# Academic Freedom & Commercialisation of Universities

## Section A: Background Information

There are four sections (A to D) to this questionnaire. Total completion time is approximately 15-20 minutes. If you are experiencing technical difficulties viewing the questionnaire, please consult the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.

<b>1. Gender.</b>	<input type="text" value="Select"/>	
	<i>Male, Female.</i>	
<b>2. Nature of appointment.</b>	<input type="text" value="Select"/>	
	<i>Continuing (tenured, tenurable), Non-continuing (contract), Other.</i>	
<b>3. Level of appointment.</b>	<input type="text" value="Select"/>	Other <input type="text"/>
	<i>Level E (eg. Professor), Level D (eg. Associate Professor/Reader), Level C (eg. Senior Lecturer), Level B (eg. Lecturer/Research Fellow), Level A (eg. Associate Lecturer/Tutor/Postdoctoral Fellow).</i>	
<b>4. How long have you been working as an academic?</b>	<input type="text" value="Select"/>	
	<i>Under 2 years, 2 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years, 21 years or over.</i>	
<b>5. Please name your university in the space provided.</b>	<input type="text"/>	
<b>6. What is the subject/disciplinary area in which you are mainly engaged?</b>	<input type="text" value="Select"/>	Other <input type="text"/>
	<i>Education, Sociology, Political Science, Economics/Commerce, Women's Studies, Media and Communications, Aboriginal Studies, Management, Other.</i>	
<b>7. In which of the following activities are you currently engaged?</b>	<b>Please estimate the % for each relevant activity.</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate teaching	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate course teaching	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate supervision	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Research and publication	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Service	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Administration	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Other : <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	%

Technical Problems? See the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.



## Section B: Research Activities and Funding

**8. How has your research been funded in the past four years?** Please indicate the sources and their % of your total funding.

<input type="checkbox"/> ARC	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Other government	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Private industry	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Sources internal to your university - through competitive application	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Sources internal to your university - through non-competitive distribution	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-funded research	<input type="text"/>	%
<input type="checkbox"/> Other : <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	%

**9. How much funding (research or consultancy) from sources external to your university have you (and your research collaborators) attracted in the last four years?**

Select

*Under \$10 000, \$10 000 to \$20 000, \$20 000 to \$50 000, \$50 000 to \$100 000, \$100 000 to \$150 000, \$150 000 to \$200 000, Over \$200 000.*

**10. To what extent have you engaged in each of the following types of research over the last four years?**

	Not at all	To a minor extent	To a major extent
Research concerned with advancing theory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research directed to informing your teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policy-oriented research, to assist or inform public or voluntary bodies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied professional, business or industry-related research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Technical Problems? See the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.



## Section C: Satisfaction with Academic Freedom

11. Academic freedom is not a well defined concept. We would like to know what academic freedom means to you.

12. Below are some commonly identified aspects of academic freedom. In the left column, please rate each of these in terms of their importance to you. In the right column, please rate each of these in terms of your satisfaction with them.

	Importance				Satisfaction			
	Low	Moderate	High	N/A	Low	Moderate	High	N/A
Maintenance of intellectual property rights in course design and content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Freedom to teach contentious propositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Freedom to determine student standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintenance of intellectual property rights in research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Freedom to publish without fear of censorship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The right to choose colleagues for research collaboration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The right to seek peer review on findings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Freedom to define research topics and methods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Freedom from accountability to any source (e.g. professional bodies, ethical guidelines)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Low	Moderate	High	N/A	Low	Moderate	High	N/A

13. Please elaborate on your level of satisfaction with academic freedom within your university. (We remind you that your responses will be treated in strict confidence.)

**14. What personal strategies or university structures assist you in maintaining academic freedom?** (e.g. Negotiating publishing rights at contract, no longer applying for funding, building a network of supportive colleagues, assistance in negotiating contracts through Research Services.)

**15. Below are some experiences that may be associated with commercialisation of Australian universities. Please identify the extent to which they have applied to you.**

	Not at all	To a minor extent	To a major extent
Reluctance to criticise institutions that provide large research grants or other forms of support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cross-fertilisation of ideas through interaction with industry and government sectors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discomfort with publishing contentious research results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enhancement of the quality of research through interaction with external funding bodies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being prevented from publishing contentious results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An increasing atmosphere of competition among colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduced research time due to writing grant applications and tenders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emphasis on funded research over unfunded research within your university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inhibition about sharing ideas with colleagues for reasons of commercial-in-confidence information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Changes to research focus because of possible lack of funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Valuing of courses that attract full fee-paying students over other courses within your university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Valuing of courses that attract high student enrolments over other courses within your university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**16. Please elaborate on any of your experiences in the space provided.**

Technical Problems? See the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.





## Section D: Overview

**17a. Has the state of academic freedom in your university improved or deteriorated over the past four years?**

*Major Deterioration, Minor Deterioration, No Change, Minor Improvement, Major Improvement, Don't Know.*

**17b. To what extent are such changes (if any) related to increasing commercialisation of your university?**

*Not at all, To a Minor Extent, To a Major Extent.*

**17c. Overall, how concerned are you about the state of academic freedom in your university?**

*Not at all, To a Minor Extent, To a Major Extent.*

**18. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on that you think is relevant to this study of commercialisation and academic freedom? (We are particularly interested in any instance where you felt that academic freedom has been enhanced or impeded as a result of commercialisation.)**

**Would you be willing to take part in a follow-up interview on these issues?**

**If yes, please provide:**

**Your daytime contact phone number.**

**Preferred E-mail address**

*Thank you for your help with this research.*



Technical Problems? See the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.



## Appendix C

### Coding Categories and Frequencies for Questionnaire Open-Ended Items

**Question 11. Academic freedom is not a well-defined concept. We would like to know what academic freedom means to you.**

<b>Response rate 86%</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	
Individual		
Responsible and disciplined exercise of freedom to write and teach	96	92
Ability to pursue contentious questions irrespective of vested interests	114	105
Time for reflection and scholarly pursuits	8	10
Collegial		
Collegial determination of work practices	18	19
Collegial decision making on teaching and research content and Standards	12	10
Collegial decision making on internal processes	6	10
University		
Institutional culture that supports academic freedom	10	7

**Question 13. Please elaborate on your level of satisfaction with academic freedom within your university.**

<b>Response rate 83%</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	
A. General levels of satisfaction with primary focus of study:		
Generally satisfied	51	53
Low satisfaction	10	11
No explicit attempts to undermine research interests	5	4
B. General dissatisfaction with indirect effects of commercialisation:		
Decreased funding and increased workloads cut into research time.	16	17
Demands of teaching (high student loads, course preparation, marketing) limit research time	4	4
Dissatisfaction with university ethics committees- - irrelevance to social sciences/bureaucratic	10	10
Decreased funding and increased focus on industry partnerships		
Cuts into ability to pursue independent research	5	5
Encourages safe research and prescribes sets of research		

Questions	20	17
Industry pressure to give 'right' results or not to publish	3	5
Clusters research into exclusive categories	2	5
C. General dissatisfaction with other aspects	6	5
Managerial/Collegial pressures to conform to teaching orthodoxies	8	9
Intellectual ownership of online material is unsatisfactory	7	7
Erosion of standards in admission and assessment to retain students	6	6
Increasing managerialism with little transparency in decision making	8	11

**Question 14. What personal strategies or university structures assist you in maintaining academic freedom? (eg. Negotiating publishing rights at contract, no longer applying for funding, building a network of supportive colleagues, assistance in negotiating contracts through research Services).**

Response rate = 75%	frequencies	
Building networks of Collegial support		
- internal and external to the university	46	44
Avoid funded research altogether	23	21
Strong negotiation of contract	19	20
No strategies to deal with situation	17	19
Seek out Research Services and educational seminars	9	7
Self-confidence in speaking out (status as researcher)	4	4
Avoid contentious issues	4	4
Hard work	4	4
Ethics Committee	4	4
Keeping a low profile	3	3
Union	3	3
Resignation	2	2

**Question 16. Please elaborate on any of your experiences (that may be associated with the commercialisation of universities).**

Response rate = 32%	frequencies	
Impact of commercialisation on research		
Emphasis on funded over unfunded research undermined independent research time	15	18
Change in research focus to areas tangential to expertise to attract funding or promotion	4	3
Reduction in research time because of teaching and administration	7	9
Industry constraints on research findings	3	5
Government constraints on research findings	2	2

University constraints on research findings	1	1
Emphasis on applied rather than theoretical research	3	3
Stronger research profile as a result of industry contact/industry linkages	2	3
Impact of commercialisation on teaching		
Change in teaching focus to attract funding	5	6
Changes to teaching content to attract full fee paying students	6	7
Valuing of courses that attract funds	6	8
Lack of infrastructure to support full fee paying students	2	2
Pressures for full fee paying students to pass	4	4
University pressures to admit full fee paying applicants	2	3
Offshore courses developed at expense of local courses	1	1
Decision making processes		
Autocratic decision making	2	2
Financial rewards from industry linkages redirect to university management	3	3
Increased competition		
Collegial competition increases demoralisation	2	2
Collegial competition improves research performance	1	1
More departmental competition	1	1
More university competition	1	1

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**Question 18. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on that you think is relevant to this study of commercialisation and academic freedom?**

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<b>Response rate = 35%</b>	<b>frequencies</b>	
<b>Positive views of commercialisation</b>		
Funded research creates relevance and accountability	1	1
Funded research sparks innovative responses	1	1
Industry partnerships has been stimulating	2	3
Academy too internally focused, need to get policy relevant	1	1
Negotiation of contracts can be rewarding	1	1
<b>Negative views of commercialisation</b>		
<b>Impact on research</b>		
Industry undermines independent thinking and innovation in universities	8	8

Research not directly impeded but indirectly because of resource constraints	1	1
Pressure to undertake funded research	2	4
Commercialisation can compromise academics ethically	1	1
Impact on teaching		
Commercialisation is changing the types of courses offered	2	2
Commercialisation increases administrative tasks, undermines research time	2	1
Funded research can undermine quality of publications	2	2
Selection/promotion processes geared towards entrepreneurial applicants rather than scholars,	1	1
Decline in teaching standards as result of commercial courses	4	3
Full fee paying students pressure to pass	1	1
Student rights need to be balanced against academic rights	2	2
Rights to course sold without consultation	1	1
The framing of the problem		
Major concern with university sector but not individual University	1	1
Major problem is managerialism	2	1
Management has an intellectual posturing that is unreal	1	1
Redundancies tied to commercialisation	1	1
Marketisation of entire tertiary sector is problem, not Commercialisation	1	1
Deregulation was major problem in universities	1	1
Economic rationalism is the danger in universities	1	1
Government decreased funding needs to be called to task by public	2	2
Federal government too directive in shaping research activity	1	1

---

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview schedule**

Introduce self. State role in project. Thankyou for agreeing to be interviewed. I appreciate your taking the time to assist with this research. Have you read the interview consent form? Do you have any questions?

### **Commercialisation**

1. As you know this project is about the effect of commercialisation on academic freedom. We never defined commercialisation in the project. What did you understand commercialisation to mean as you completed the questionnaire?

### **Academic Freedom**

2. You know that this project is about academic freedom in the context of commercialisation. However, there are many definitions of academic freedom. Do you still agree with your definition of academic freedom and would you elaborate on your response, please? What is the purpose of academic freedom? What does it help you to achieve? What does its absence prevent you from achieving?

3. We are also interested in academic freedom in practice. Can you give me an example of where you have exercised academic freedom or where you feel academic freedom has been hindered as a result of commercialisation?

4. One of the results from the project appeared to indicate that some academics interpret academic freedom to mean freedom from accountability to any source. What do you see as the relationship between academic freedom and accountability?

### **The Survey Findings**

5. There were a number of responses in the questionnaire that were puzzling or that could be viewed as contradictions. I would like to outline three and ask your response to them.

- a. Many of the responses described academic freedom as a disciplined individual autonomy. They did not describe academic freedom as a collegial autonomy (as in eg the peer review process) or as an institutional autonomy (as in eg the freedoms a university may have from corporate, government or ecclesiastical pressure). How do you account for the emphasis on individual freedoms as opposed to collegial or institutional freedoms?
- b. A large number of respondents indicated that academic freedom had deteriorated to a major extent. What did you understand by major or minor extent when you were completing the survey?

- c. More respondents were concerned about the state of academic freedom to a minor extent than to a major extent. How do you account for that? What level of concern should be tolerated? What is an acceptable level of concern, if any?
- d. We were surprised by some of the findings to Q15. These were that many people thought that the university did not particularly value courses that attract high student enrolments over other courses yet many of the open ended item responses complained of this. How do you account for this? Do you think they are contradictions?

### **Response rate**

- 6. We didn't get as high a response rate from the questionnaire as we had hoped. Why do you think this was the case?

### **We've come to the close of the questionnaire. I am wondering if you have any further comments?**

I would like to thank you very much for speaking with us. We appreciate your time and the thoughtfulness.

## Appendix E

### Interview responses

1. You know that this project is about academic freedom in the context of commercialisation. However, there are many definitions of academic freedom. Do you still agree with your definition of academic freedom and would you elaborate on your response, please?

*Why Academic freedom is important?*

Seek the truth

Intellectual excellence

It gives the space to think critically about society without fear or favour eg free to criticise authorities

Free and intellectual exploration of ideas

Promotes research and teaching quality

Promotes development of new ideas

Identifies and addresses new challenges

Promotes speaking of important knowledge and understandings for the good of society

*What is the purpose of academic freedom?*

Pure research

Support the pursuit of knowledge and truth

Free exploration and expression of ideas without sanctions

To pass on disciplinary knowledge

To improve learning

Allow society to deal with change

Give time and space to explore and express ideas

*What does it help them to achieve?*

Intellectual freedom

Critical and constructive comment on society

Independence of research and teaching

Quality and integrity of teaching and research

Freedom from ideological/industry domination

Constraints on teaching content

Protection of standards and quality rather than quantity

Maintenance of academic standards

Better critical and expansive thinking/learning outcomes for students

Better engagement with society/ contribution to society

Promotion of critical thinking

Community service benefits and a voice for the social good (especially the dispossessed)

*What does its absence prevent them from achieving?*

Reduces students ability to learn

Less freedom to think

Truth is not spoken and ideas not explained

Long term perspectives



Free exploration of ideas  
 Accidental discovery  
 High standards in critical thinking  
 Internal motivation and interest  
 Fearless social inquiry  
 Loss of integrity of a field of knowledge  
 Undermines academic values  
 Devaluing of intellectual knowledge  
 Prevents development of knowledge needed by society

2. We are also interested in academic freedom in practice. Can you give me an example of where you have exercised academic freedom or where you feel academic freedom has been hindered as a result of commercialisation?

Respondents cited restrictions on teaching standards and on the publication of research findings and the pressure to find external funding. Excessive workload resulted from the drive to commercialisation. Lack of promotional opportunities if not seen to be commercial. Courses that were not financially viable were closed.

3. One of the results from the project appeared to indicate that some academics interpret academic freedom to mean freedom from accountability to any source. What do you see as the relationship between academic freedom and accountability?

Respondents felt that they had a responsibility to society to provide independent, deep and critical analysis and to provide balanced expertise, to encourage students to think critically. They thought that they should resist finding 'correct' results. There was a strong interpretation that academics should maintain standards.

Most said that they did not agree with a lack of accountability. There was some conflict between the accountability to the society at large and the accountability to the funding body. There is financial accountability, research accountability and accountability to students.

### **The Survey Findings**

4. There were a number of responses in the questionnaire that were puzzling or that could be viewed as contradictions. I would like to outline three and ask your response to them.
- a. Many of the responses described academic freedom as a disciplined individual autonomy. They did not describe academic freedom as a collegial autonomy (as in eg the peer review process) or as an institutional autonomy (as in eg the freedoms a university may have from corporate, government or ecclesiastical pressure). How do you account for the emphasis on individual freedoms as opposed to collegial or institutional freedoms?

There is an emphasis on individualism in western society and individualism is a major motivating factor for becoming an academic. Commercialisation promotes individual research performance management and privileges research over

teaching. This, in turn, promotes the shift from collegial values to individual values.

Collegial autonomy was being eroded through competition under commercialisation. Many were avoiding funded research or opting out and this also weakens collegial autonomy, although it does strengthen individual autonomy, but only in the short term. Collegial autonomy is probably less of a reality in the newer universities. Management was ignoring collegial health and fostering excessive individualism.

The relationship between the different levels of autonomy is a situation similar to a 'House of Cards'. If you pick one out they all fall down. It is bad sociology to emphasise individual autonomy. The peer review process is fundamental because it determines worth on merit, not on politics. The universities autonomy is financially constrained. One line budgets from the government help to maintain institutional autonomy.

- b. A large number of respondents indicated that academic freedom had deteriorated to a major extent. What did you understand by major or minor extent when you were completing the survey?

Minor extent means indirect pressures constraining their ability to research independently. Major extent would mean that there were direct constraints on the ability to teach and research independently.

- c. More respondents were concerned about the state of academic freedom to a minor extent than to a major extent. How do you account for that? What level of concern should be tolerated? What is an acceptable level of concern, if any?

No deterioration is acceptable. Any deterioration needs to be addressed. There has been major deterioration by increment. Academics are complicit in their self-serving acceptance of the industrialisation of universities. In any system, the majority will not challenge the orthodoxy.

### **Commercialisation**

5. As you know this project is about the effect of commercialisation on academic freedom. We never defined commercialisation in the project. What did you understand commercialisation to mean as you completed the questionnaire?

Using internal capital for generating revenue. Academic activity subsumed to commercial profit and outcomes. Conducting of research for economic gain, rather than the greater good of society.

Shift towards teaching and research that is commercially funded. This allows greater influence of external stakeholders and their values.

Effects are the lowering of standards, and the devaluing of unfunded activities including community service.

**Response rate**

6. We didn't get as high a response rate from the questionnaire as we had hoped. Why do you think this was the case?

Workload

Survey fatigue

Fear that management would read their e-mails.

## Appendix F

### Background to sample characteristics

#### Academic staff population

Table B.21 of the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) Key Statistics (2000) outlines the numbers of full-time equivalent and fractional full-time academic staff for selected years between 1988 and 1999.

#### Number of Full-Time and Fractional Full-Time Academic Staff, 1988-1999

Year	1988	1991	1994	1996	1998	1999
Academic Staff	25,935	29,766	32,195	33,133	32,663	32,406

The NBEET (1998, 237) review of the Social Sciences estimated that in 1996, based on 31,365 full time equivalent (FTE) academic staff, approximately 31% of all academic staff were in the Social Sciences – 7.51% in Social Studies, 7.51% in Education and 14.19% in Administration, Business, Economics, Law (1998, pp. 235-6).

#### Academic classifications

The table below details the number of full-time and fractional full-time academics by classification for 1998 (McInnis 2000 Table B3, p. 79).

#### Full-Time and Fractional Full-Time Academic Staff by Classification for 1998

Level	1998 National	%
Lecturer A + Below	6663	20.39
Lecturer B	11464	35.09
Senior Lecturer C	8074	24.63
Assoc Prof/Prof/S/E	6489	19.86
Total	32663	

#### Classification by gender

The AVCC Key Statistics (2000, Table B.20) presented female academic classifications for selected years.

#### Proportion of Female Full-Time and Fractional Full-Time Academic Staff by Classification (%)

Classification	1985	1992	1996	1998	1999
Below Lecturer	45.2	51.3	51.6	50.9	50.4
Lecturer	28.2	39.9	41.6	41.9	42.7
Senior Lecturer	10.8	19.1	24.3	26.5	24.8
Above Senior Lecturer	6.0	10.1	13.4	14.4	15.4
Total	21.6	31.9	34.1	34.1	34.5

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