

Polling Brief – University Vice Chancellors

In July 2015 The Australia Institute conducted a national opinion poll of 1408 people through Research Now. Respondents were selected to produce a representative sample based on gender, age and state.

The survey asked about the government’s higher education policy and about opinions on Australia’s universities. The poll focused on opinions of universities and funding arrangements.

The poll was broken into two sections. The first section focused on opinions of universities and funding arrangements ([see previous report here](#)), the second section focused on vice chancellors.

Key results

Asked to nominate the average vice chancellor’s salary, a wide range of salaries were nominated, with an average of \$250,000. In reality, where most vice chancellors are paid over \$750,000. 87% of people said this was “too much”.

There was a very low level of understanding of vice chancellors support for deregulation. Only 12% said “almost all” vice chancellors supported deregulation, and 21% said “many supported”. 21% said half or less supported and 45% said they did not know.

Respondents were then told almost all vice chancellors supported deregulation, and asked to rank reasons why they thought this was. The highest ranking (most selected in top 2) were “for their university to be secure against funding cuts” and “for their university to become richer”. 23% of people placed “to provide better quality education” in the top 2, but twice as many (47%) placed it in the bottom 2.

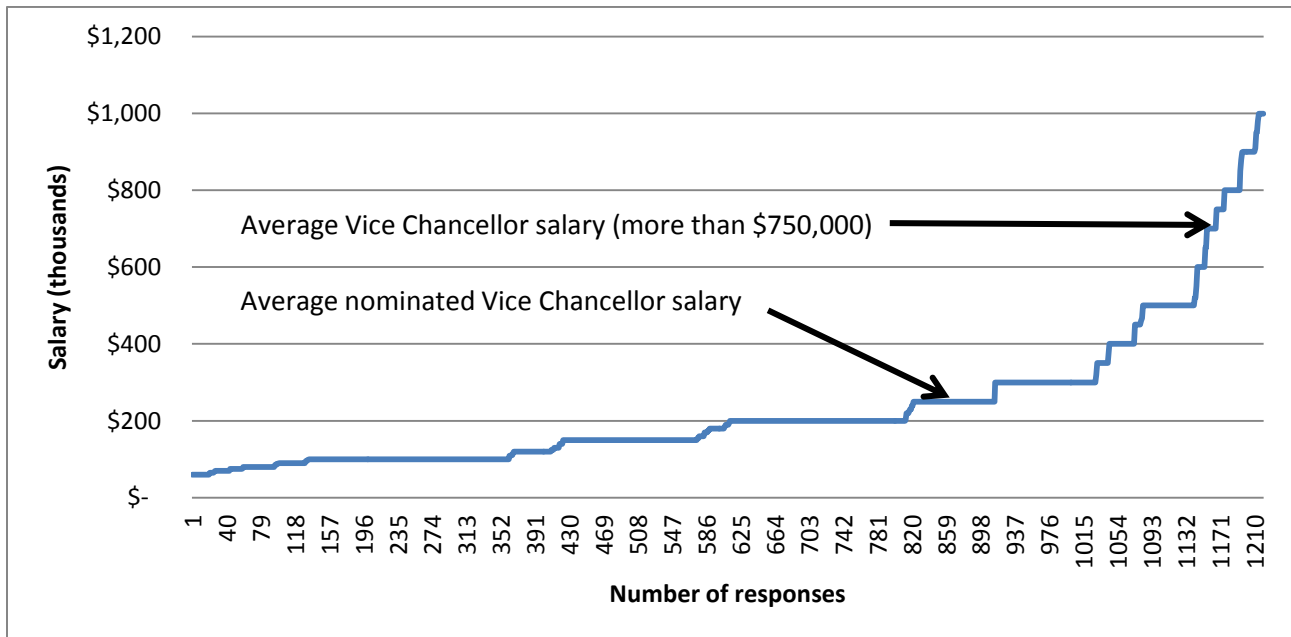
Analysis

The public perception of the salary of Australian university vice chancellors is vastly out of alignment with the reality. Additionally, the lack of public knowledge of VC’s position on the issue of deregulation shows that their unsuccessful advocacy for those proposed reforms went largely unnoticed. Despite being paid very large salaries, our VCs totally failed to explain why they needed deregulation and build public support.

The government’s decision to roll back its decision on university funding is an opportunity for everyone – the government and the vice chancellors who supported the plan – to go back to the question: what are our universities for? What do we want them to provide for society? And what policies do we need for that to happen?

Polling Breakdown

To the best of your knowledge, what is the average yearly salary of a vice chancellor at Australian universities? (NB: results exclude under \$50,000)



The average vice chancellor in Australia is paid more than \$750,000 per year. Do you think this is...

- 87% said this was “too much”

To the best of your knowledge, have Australian vice chancellors supported or opposed the government's policy of deregulating student fees?

Nearly all supported	Many supported	Half supported, half opposed	Many opposed	Nearly all opposed	Not sure/Don't know
12%	21%	13%	6%	3%	45%

Nearly all of Australia's vice chancellors supported deregulating student fees. In your view, why do you think they did this? Please rank from 1 to 6.

