

Day 1 Summary

1. In session 1 questions were raised about the climate of public funding of research led universities in Australasia, Latin America and the USA. Total funding figures need to be disaggregated to distinguish funding which goes to students from that which goes to universities. Direct funding to universities is critical if they are to pursue their strategic priorities. Concerns were expressed about the poor alignment of funding systems with equity and participation agendas.
2. One response to constrained funding is for universities to review their non-core activities (including administration) in order to secure efficiencies that will release funds for core teaching and research activities. These exercises present change-management challenges to provosts and senior leaders in planning and implementation. They also require effective communication with academic staff so that they are aware of their purpose and do not see them as mere cost saving exercises.
3. In this case, as with the staff research performance issues discussed in the session three, benchmarking can play an important role. There is scope here for collaboration between members of APRU who operate in similar financial and regulatory contexts.
4. During the course of the discussion participants expressed skepticism at government assumptions about the financial and participatory benefits of online learning. Well-developed programmes of online learning are costly to develop and maintain and this mode of instruction is better suited to experienced learners who already know how to learn. However, blended learning provides options for enhancing on-campus experience and providing students with more flexible learning options which help them balance study with other commitments and interests.
5. Online learning provides scope for providing ongoing postgraduate education that will align with work and family commitments and help our alumni and other experienced learners acquire capabilities that will meet changing labour-market demands. These programmes, which may involve both formal qualifications, truncated 'microcredentials', and more narrowly tailored professional development, may provide ways of raising high-margin revenue that is independent of government funding streams. They may also provide scope for collaboration between APRU members drawing on distinctive areas of strength.
6. Ongoing security of government funding for research-led public universities requires the development of a narrative which tells a compelling story of the social and economic contributions of their teaching and research programmes. The provision of ongoing professionally-oriented postgraduate education on a large scale may be part of this narrative since it provides ongoing preparation for evolving work place demands in business, government and social roles.

6. The same is true of the integrated approach to fundamental and high yield research that was the focus of the second session. The HIBARR initiative is a good example of this approach; others were canvassed in this and the fourth session. Speakers pointed out that the relationship between fundamental research, community problem solving and the generation of new problems for fundamental research constitutes a virtuous circle which is closely aligned with the mission of research universities. This approach corresponds with the motivation of leading researchers and draws on the distinctive range of capabilities possessed by research-led universities and the taste for risk that characterizes university research agendas. It provides embedded opportunities for students to see their research in ways that will prepare them for career beyond academia.

7. The HIBARR approach requires

—sophisticated networking

—the effective utilisation of technology transfer offices

—genuine integration of interdisciplinary teams, included the non-token utilisation of researchers from non-stem and non-tec disciplines

—the authentic engagement of faculty and genuine partnerships with stakeholders beyond the university—as one presenter at the 4th session put it, the distinction between being inside and outside the university is an unhelpful one. The goal is to integrate and optimise university and extra-university talent and resources

—a focus on long-term outcomes

8. A second theme that emerged in the first session concerned the need to encourage and facilitate mobility by graduate students. This matter was raised by a representative from China and gained wider-traction in a number of sessions. There may be scope for APRU to encourage and facilitate these exchanges, perhaps by an undertaking for each member to fund a fixed number of them.

9. It is significant that themes which emerged in sessions 1 and 2 (benchmarking, use of technology, the value of a degree and the importance of interdisciplinarity) played a significant role in in the workshop in session three and in the discussion of research in session four.