

Topics of current interest

*Presented to the ACDS Executive Meeting on 11 August 2025
Covering the period May to August 2025.*

The following are recent articles and reports that may be of interest to Deans of Science. This list is not meant to indicate a particular point of view from the ACDS. We encourage you to follow the links to the original articles.

1. Unis are failing employers, job tsar warns

The Australian, Wednesday 23 July 2025

- Job Skills Australia is reported as saying that universities are failing to produce work-ready graduates. Graduates lack hands-on experience, cannot communicate clearly or work in a team. While Engineering and IT are mentioned, it seems from their research that the biggest problem is in finding the right people for technical and trade jobs. For me, this means we need to support the value of TAFE and vocational education.

2. 2025 Gen Z and Millennial survey

<https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/issues/work/genz-millennial-survey.html>

Deloitte, May 2025

- This is a global survey which includes about 800 Australian people born between 1983 and 2006. The report suggests that globally these people are facing economic pressures (so financial security is important), they are grappling with rapid technological change (including AI) and they want employers to do more for them (to help them learn and develop, to provide meaningful work and wellbeing). They also question (globally) the value of higher education – perhaps vocational training is more important in providing practical skills. However their main criticism is simply the cost of a university degree.

3. Fixing the ‘crisis’ of Australian universities

The Australian Financial Review, Friday 13 June 2025

- This article suggests that in his first term Minister Clare was focused on improving access for students and reducing their university tuition debt. In his second term he is focused on reforming the university system more broadly.

4. Universities aren’t pizza joints; stop treating them that way

The Australian Financial Review, Friday 27 June 2025

- Higher education is not just another industry. A university degree is not just another vocational training option. The idea that ‘universities deliver a course, students acquire skills and qualifications and then go on to secure employment’ is transactional. But higher education is much more complex and the value to society is much richer than this.

5. From fragmented to future-ready – reforming research in Australia

<https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/policy-submissions/research-innovations/research-funding-2/>

Universities Australia, July 2025.

- This is a series of four very brief reports. The first two have been published. They argue that ‘more than a dozen [government] portfolios are involved in running over a hundred different research programs often with no shared strategy, no consistent approach and no clear way to align efforts’. The solution: consolidate programs, create a Ministerial Research Council, raise public R&D investment in research.

6. Incentivising business investment in R&D

<https://www.science.org.au/supporting-science/science-advice-and-policy/reports-and-publications/issues-paper-incentivising-business-investment-in-rd>

The Australian Academy of Science, 24 July 2025

- The Academy proposes incentivising R&D investment by essentially applying a levy to large businesses who don’t invest in R&D. There is detail in their document to show how this could be used to benefit businesses, researchers and the economy. They show that Australia sits well below the average OECD investment by the business sector and they argue that this threatens our productivity and our standard of living.

7. Strategic examination of R&D: discussion paper consultation findings and analysis

<https://consult.industry.gov.au/strategic-examination-rd-discussion-paper>

Department of Industry, Science and Resources, July 2025

- This paper summarises initial conclusions from the panel’s analysis of over 600 submissions. Australia needs to facilitate collaboration and alignment between the many funding programs, have targeted incentives for innovation and investment, and focus on the impact of research. Fundamental research is important but we must create value from our investments. They talk about the importance of research, development and innovation (where innovation means commercialisation or end-user impact). R&D is a long-term endeavour. They say they will release various issues papers in coming months.

8. Australia’s Higher Education sector faces a financial and strategic reset

<https://kordamentha.com/insights/australia%E2%80%99s-higher-education-sector-faces-a-financ>

KordaMentha 2025 Higher Education Report, Wednesday 6 August 2025

- KordaMentha is an Australian advisory and investment firm. They have analysed 30 Australian university annual reports and the results of a national survey of university COOs and CFOs. They say that overall debt has increased, cash reserves have fallen and 20 universities report more liabilities than assets. They recommend cost optimisation, digital transformation and smarter asset use – just what a Dean wants to hear! One of their key actions is ‘Accelerate digital transformation to enhance student outcomes, efficiency and competitiveness’. This strong business perspective needs to be balanced with the requirements for quality education and research.

And two recent books for the ACDS book club: 😊

- Graeme Turner, 2025, “Broken: universities, politics and the public good”
- Elizabeth Finkel, 2025, “Prove it: a scientific guide for the post-truth era”

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