

Patterns of recruitment of academic leaders to Australian universities and implications for the future of higher education.

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This paper reports on research conducted to understand key factors impacting on the recruitment and selection of senior academic leaders in Australian universities. Australian universities make a significant contribution to Australian society in providing high quality learning and teaching that prepares graduates to meet the needs of industry while also generating new knowledge through research, development and innovation. In addition to these traditional contributions to Australian society, universities now make a direct contribution to the economy representing 1.5 per cent of Australia's GDP and, through international sector earnings alone, contributing \$18.2 billion to the Australian economy as the third largest export and largest service export (Universities Australia, 2016). Further, universities employ approximately 120,000 people (Universities Australia, 2016) and are often the largest employer in regional areas. Hence, the sustainability of the higher education sector is critically important for the Australian economy and the overall community. As Australian universities operate in an increasingly competitive, business-like and dynamic environment, it is imperative that high calibre senior academic leaders with the knowledge and experience to successfully navigate this context are appointed. A key finding emerging from this research of senior academic leadership recruitment processes in eight Australian universities was an increasingly heavy reliance on executive search firms. This reliance is driven by a range of factors including an aging and contracting pool of potential academic leaders, growing competition domestically and internationally and the declining attractiveness of academia as a sustainable career in the context of increased casualization of academic labour. Concurrently, workforce planning and succession planning have not hitherto been high priorities for universities. As a result, Australian universities are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit senior academic leaders without the assistance of executive search firms. This has implications for ensuring a sustainable, competitive and high quality higher education sector for Australia. This presentation shares research findings, conclusions and questions arising that are relevant to the future of Australian higher education.

