

How to Create a World Class University

Chair:

Professor John Daley
CEO, Grattan Institute

Speaker:

Professor Andrew Hamilton
Vice-Chancellor, The University of Oxford

Discussants:

Professor Margaret Gardner
Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University

Professor Judith Brett
Head of Social Sciences, La Trobe University

Professor Glyn Davis
Universities Australia Chair 2011 - 2013

28 July 2011

Transcript

In an era of globalisation, everyone wants to be world class. But what is the real measure of a world class university, and what does it take to get there?

Professor Andrew Hamilton has been a leader in two universities that are world class by any measure, first as Provost at Yale and now as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford.

Professor Hamilton was joined by Professor Margaret Gardner, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University, Professor Judith Brett, Head of the School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Professor Glyn Davis, Universities Australia Chair 2011 - 2013, for their perspectives on creating world class universities in Australia.

Chair: Professor John Daley, CEO, Grattan Institute
Speaker: Professor Andrew Hamilton, Vice-Chancellor, The University of Oxford
Discussants: Professor Margaret Gardner, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University
Professor Judith Brett, Head of Social Sciences, La Trobe University
Professor Glyn Davis, Universities Australia Chair 2011 - 2013

AUDIO: This is a podcast from Grattan Institute, www.grattan.edu.au.

JOHN: Good evening ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. My name is John Daley. I'm the Chief Executive of the Grattan Institute and it's my pleasure to welcome you here tonight for a discussion about world class universities. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this event takes place, and acknowledge their elders, past and present.

Tonight's event brings two conflicting themes. On the one hand, Australia is a country obsessed with international comparisons. Few countries care as much about the Olympic Games medal tally as Australia. And when the Australian government wanted to measure excellence of research for Australia in our higher education institutions, it counted world class research disciplines in each university. Maybe it's a manifestation of the cultural cringe, but whatever the reason, anxiety about being world class is a common theme in Australian life.

On the other hand, Australia is not a country obsessed with higher education. There aren't many page one, or even page 21, stories about higher education in our newspapers. And even though almost 20% of Australians have some kind of higher education qualification, and 5% are currently enrolled, it's a long time since an Australia election turned on any kind of issue to do with higher education.

But of course, higher education is central to our wellbeing. The quality of our higher education drives the capability of our people to participate in the economy and in public life. Universities are a big driver of our culture in the long run. Better higher education, even world class higher education, does seem like a good idea. That's why Grattan Institute, committed to improving Australian public policy, has recently instituted a higher education program supported by the Myer Foundation. I'm delighted to welcome a number of representatives from the Myer Foundation here tonight, and I'd like to acknowledge both the generosity and the foresight of the Foundation in supporting the program. And I'd also like to welcome Andrew Norton, who's recently been appointed as the inaugural Higher Education Program Director at Grattan Institute.

The need to do better in higher education is of course the reason we are here tonight. We have an address from Professor Andy Hamilton, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, which will then be discussed by three of Australia's leading academics: Professors Margaret Gardener, the Vice-Chancellor of RMIT University; Professor Judith Brett, Head of the School of

Social Sciences at Latrobe University; and Professor Glyn Davis, now Chair of Universities Australia. And we'll then have an opportunity for questions from the floor. So in order to keep the proceedings brief, I might if I may introduce all of the speakers at once, and then ask them to speak. And then as I said, run the gauntlet of your questions.

I'll introduce Andy in a moment. He'll be followed by Professor Margaret Gardener, who's the Vice-Chancellor of RMIT University. She has a distinguished career as an economist, particularly in labour relations, and has worked at we think nine universities, a number of them internationally, which I think fits a theme that we'll see recurring this evening about how internationalised higher education has become. She currently chairs the Museums Board of Victoria, and she's contributed to a number of policy bodies and advisory boards on higher education, such as the Commonwealth government's Higher Education Research Reference Group.

She'll be followed by Professor Judy Brett, who's the Head of the School of Social Sciences at Latrobe University. She's worked there since 1989 teaching and writing about Australian politics and political history and recently she contributed an enlivening history of regional policy in Australia through the quarterly essay, which I mention not least because it came out unfortunately a few weeks after Grattan Institute had published on the subject, and would almost certainly have changed my opinion about a number of things if I'd had the change to read it first.

And then she will be followed by Professor Glyn Davis. He's the Chair of Universities Australia and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. He was previously Vice-Chancellor of Griffith University, and has served as the most senior Queensland public servant. He also has a distinguished career as a researcher on policy, politics and governance and delivered the ABC's Boyer Lectures in 2010 on higher education. Professor Glyn Davis has worked at five universities, two of them internationally and Professor Judy Brett has worked at four. So as you can see, almost all of our academics have worked in a number of places, often internationally.

To begin proceedings, we have Professor Andy Hamilton. He is almost the under-achiever of this group, having only worked at five universities, and of course is now the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Oxford. As someone born in Cambridge and educated at Oxford, I would of course say that Professor Hamilton is the leader of the United Kingdom's leading university, although some people might dispute that. He was the provost at Yale University, without doubt one the United States' leading universities. And he also has a distinguished academic career in chemistry. He's been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and he received the international Izatt-Christensen Award in macrocyclic chemistry in 2011, and there will be a short three hour exam at the conclusion of the proceedings.

It would be difficult to think of anyone, given his background, who's more qualified to discuss world class universities in the 21st century, and I'd like to thank him for coming to talk to us tonight. Professor Andy Hamilton.

ANDY: John, thank you very much indeed for that introduction. And let me say that come summer of 2012, there's going to be another country that will be equally as obsessed about Olympic gold medals as Australia, and that will be the United Kingdom, since the Olympic Games will be in London as we know. And let me say, what a treat it is for me to be here in Melbourne, to be in Australia. This is my first trip here as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. And even though I've only been in that job for two years, I know that this trip is long overdue. And let me also thank the Grattan Institute and its CEO John Daley, for hosting this terrific event.

The Institute's mission, as John has said, is to improve public policy in Australia by bringing facts to bear and by stimulating public debate on critical issues, ranging from energy to productivity growth, to tonight's subject, education. And I'm honoured and pleased to be sharing the stage this evening with such a distinguished panel.

I've taken as my subject the world class universities in the 21st century. And I want to discuss briefly what it takes for universities to achieve and sustain world class status. The very highest of international standards. And this is by no means just a theoretical exercise, because I think we all here tonight recognise that top universities are unique institutions that are immensely valuable to our local, to our national, to our global societies. They have a transformative effect on the lives of their students, challenging them to even greater heights of achievement, and sending them out into the world equipped to assume positions of leadership.

World class universities also conduct research that transforms our understanding of the world, past and present, and that very much cures real world problems from disease to issues of global policy, migration and other very challenging questions. Universities generate ideas that become businesses. They create value for our economies. And there's no question that governments from Beijing to Berlin are investing billions in a bid to transform their universities to become world class institutions. So their existence and just as importantly their persistence matters enormously, not only to the people who work and study in universities, but also to the people in the societies around them.

Now in my view, a world class university comes down to four things. Outstanding people, a focus on research excellence underpinned by an international and open outlook. Thirdly a commitment to high quality education, and then fourthly and perhaps most importantly, sustainable funding to ensure that excellence and access to that excellence.

Now let me start with outstanding people in defining what it takes to be world class. Because ultimately, that is really all it comes down to. We talk in universities a great deal about buildings and in Oxford, with our glorious 12th and 13th and 14th century buildings, we take particular pride in architecture. It matters of course also that we have excellent equipment and state of the art libraries and laboratories. But a university much more is defined by the quality of the minds working within it. World class universities are sustained by the presence of world class minds. This means first and foremost, outstanding professors. People who are doing the rigorous and the original research, and who had set high standards for their colleagues and for their students, and who inspire them to do great work themselves. These world class minds are constantly pushing forward the boundaries of knowledge in their fields. At every leading university that I've worked at, a huge part of any academic leader's job, whether head of department, provost, or Vice-Chancellor, is to make sure that the university recruits and retains the very best academics.

And there are important scale effects here. World class universities have lots of talented people in all subjects, and at all stages of career development. These people think hard about whether they ... the world class universities think hard about whether they have a critical mass of excellent people in any given field, because it's very hard to attract great people without other outstanding colleagues already in place.

To give you a concrete example of this, one of the most exciting things to happen in Oxford this autumn will be that Andrew Wiles will return to Oxford from Princeton University. And I expect you've heard of Professor Wiles. He's arguably the most famous mathematician in the world. He's the man who proved Fermat's last theorem. And Professor Wiles' arrival will cement the status of Oxford mathematics department as one of the pre-eminent departments in the world. Why? Because it has that critical mass of world leading mathematicians, an environment that Andrew Wiles will most certainly thrive in.

This example reminds us that faculty searches in world class universities are genuinely global. People over use the term war for talent in the business world. But the truth is, that there is a real and increasingly global competition for the best academic talent. At Oxford, 40% of our academic staff are citizens of countries other than the United Kingdom. Australia is the sixth largest source of academic staff at Oxford after the UK, the US, Germany, Italy and China. And among our Australian stars are Julian Savulescu, who runs our Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, he's a world renowned thinker in bio and medical ethics. Let me also mention Professor Peter Donnelly, who's the Director of our Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, and is renowned for his use of statistical methods to analyse genetic data. And then finally, Jamie Edelman, an emerging star in law, who has just left Oxford, an example of being recruited away,

has just left Oxford to become the youngest ever judge on the Western Australia Supreme Court.

And so great talent is highly mobile. And the talent isn't just coming to the well established universities of the west. This spring I visited Tsinghua University in Beijing to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Tsinghua have recently hired a former University of California Berkeley economist to run the school of economics and management. They've recruited a Princeton professor to be the Vice President of the Institute of Medicine. And John Thornton has been recruited by Tsinghua for ... John is the former President and COO of Goldman Sachs. And he's now the Professor and Director of Global Leadership there.

But of course in addition to world class professors, world class universities need the most outstanding students. And you can see the effort that leading universities put into selecting the very best students throughout the world. At Yale, where I used to work, only 7.5% of students who applied for undergraduate admission received offers this year. At Harvard it was even less, just over 6% of those who applied were admitted. And in America, this is the culminating moment, admission, of a long involved process of students working hard in their secondary school courses, and extracurricular activities, sitting SAT tests, writing essays and meeting with alumni for interviews.

In Oxford, for admission, we ask many applicants to sit additional exams. Everyone who is admitted will have an academic interview, typically with one of the professors who teach them. This level of scrutiny is absolutely essential to ensure that the students who come are of the very highest quality, both at the undergraduate level and at the graduate level.

As universities, we go into all this effort in identifying students to ensure that they maintain a high intellectual level on campus. We want students who can keep up with and who will benefit most from the challenging education that we provide them with. We want students who will challenge the ideas of their professors and help them to do great research. And we want people who will do credit to their universities as they leave and move out into academic and other fields within society.

There's no question that at Oxford, history is an enormous help. Our ability to attract students, wherever they may be, is bolstered by that strong reputation borne of 800 years of excellence. And of course in Oxford, that is enormously helped by the Rhodes scholarships that have existed now for more than a century, and that have reinforced the notion that Oxford is an excellent place for tomorrow's leaders to train. The attraction of Oxford in Australia is bolstered no doubt by the glittering achievements of our alumni in Australia, many of whom came on Rhodes scholarships. And this includes three prime ministers, and it's a delight to see Malcolm Fraser in the front row. Three prime ministers of Australia who have passed through Oxford's educational halls. And also leaders in every imaginable sector of society and the economy here in Australia.

Today many others come on Oxford's largest postgraduate scholarship program, which is called the Clarendon Awards, funded by Oxford University Press. Others come, and we're delighted that this past year has seen the first Charlie Perkins scholars for indigenous Australians, named for the man who was inspired by a visit to Oxford, to become the first indigenous man to attend university back in Australia, before going on as you all know to a distinguished career in public service.

And Australian universities, as I'm sure we'll hear in a few moments, have been energetic recruiters of international students. Twenty one per cent of students in Australian universities are international. The highest proportion in the world. Austria and UK are next in those rankings at about 15% of their students from abroad. This ability to attract international talent, both students and staff, requires not only that universities create welcoming environments, but that governments do the same. Politicians in many countries can be tempted by nationalist sentiment and fears of terrorism to shut down visa entry routes for students and staff. Most governments profess to want world class universities, but it is not possible to shut down our sources on talent and then expect us to compete with the world's best.

Now the second requirement of a world class university is research excellence. At Oxford 40% of our income comes from research grants. Our academics develop new insights into the way the world works. The way cultures interact. Into how we prevent disease and how we can tackle social problems. Universities provide the long time scales and the freedom of enquiry that enable researchers to make fundamental breakthroughs. Yes, you can see this in the very visible concrete outputs such as number of journal papers or books published, patents filed, spin out companies generated etc. But we also have to search if more intangibly for the other outputs the enhanced understanding of the past, or the greater knowledge of comparable political systems in a more informed and sensitive society.

Now many countries around the world drive research as much from the industrial sector or from independent research institutes as they do so from universities. And this is of course important. But universities offer an unparalleled environment for excellent research. A concentration of great minds, free to follow curiosity driven research agendas supported by high quality infrastructure and constantly invigorated by a regular influx of energetic students. One thing that world class universities rely on is an open international outlook on their research. You need to keep abreast of the literature internationally and be seeking to work with the best people in the world wherever they are.

And there's no question that this ability to bring minds together in collaborative work across disciplines will be increasingly important as we tackle these most difficult problems of the 21st century. And I'm delighted that in Oxford, we've been taking the lead in this area, with the establishment of a number of new initiatives. The Oxford Martin school for example is an interdisciplinary institute bringing faculty from many different subjects to tackle those critical problems of the 21st century.

Another example of inter-disciplinarity at Oxford is our newest school, the Blavatnik School of Government. In this School of Government we aim to create a dialogue among future leaders from around the world, each learning and applying cross-disciplinary knowledge and tools to address local and global challenges. As a scientist, I'm especially pleased that the school will be the first of its kind to introduce science into the core curriculum in recognition, as you are recognising in Australia today in this debate about climate change, of the important role that science has to play in shaping public policy. But the Blavatnik School will go further and include humanities in the core curriculum. I'm fascinated by their idea of using Shakespeare's Julius Caesar to teach negotiation techniques, or Henry V as a model for the arts of leadership. And this will very much be part of these foundations of fostering inter-disciplinary work but also without losing the foundation of disciplinary excellence, which is a major, major challenge for world class universities today.

So we've discussed outstanding people and research excellence. But there's no question that world class universities also must have a major emphasis on teaching. On high quality education. And of course this can take many forms. One thinks of the liberal arts colleges in the United States which have a very broad exposure of their undergraduates to a range of different subjects. There's no question that world class education can take many forms. But its goal is to equip students to analyse problems, to read critically, to conduct experiments, but most importantly to approach received wisdom with a critical eye.

And as I said, different countries approach this in different ways. The very broad engagement of the liberal arts approach in the United States. In England we have a very specialised, a single subject discipline approach for undergraduate education where students, when they come to Oxford, if they're studying engineering that's all they study, and in fact do not engage in that breadth of study that we find in the United States. In many countries, the systems fall somewhere in between these two. And it's by no means obvious to me that there's a right way or a wrong way of structuring undergraduate education. Choice is important. Different kinds of students will thrive in different environments.

It's important however to think hard about what we are trying to achieve with our curriculum and to ensure that whatever the subject mix, that we are equipping students with first rate analytical and communication skills. In this day and age of mass higher education, we have decided in Oxford over many, many decades that a combination of independent study and extremely small

group teaching is the best means of transmitting these skills. Our undergraduate tutorials, which are weekly hour long meetings, are typically one or two students with their professor, provide our students with an intense educational experience, a highly personal one, in which they are forced to think through the material themselves. And I know many of you have lived through Oxford tutorials and you will know that there is absolutely nowhere to hide. You must be on top of your material, you must be able to engage with your teacher.

For all students in Oxford, we provide membership in two academic communities, a very distinctive element of an Oxford education. We provide of course a link with the department as in other universities which is subject specific, but we also provide membership of a college which spans all subjects. Colleges originated in Oxford and Cambridge, and in a large university of 20,000 students, they provide smaller more intimate but multidisciplinary communities of around 700 or 800 students in which you live and study, and indeed some of Australia's universities are also employing the college model.

There's no question that whatever teaching or curriculum you come out with, it's clear that great universities think as hard about the education they deliver as the research they conduct. And they think about how to help their students meet the challenges that this education presents. World class universities are increasingly international in terms of their student bodies. And I think this is a topic we'll come back later. But in Oxford now, more than 40% of our student body is from outside the United Kingdom. We have many students who grow up in cultures and academic traditions quite different to those of the United Kingdom. So we have to consider in our collegiate structure in our curriculum, how best to assist them.

Now fourth and finally, world class universities require sustainable funding that helps them to achieve excellence and to ensure access for their students, regardless of their economic backgrounds. Now this may sound like a less glamorous subject than the other three, but of course it's absolutely fundamental. One of the reasons that American universities have been dominant in league tables, is without question because of their financial resources. Their endowments have provided them with secure funding, and therefore the ability to support great professors, to build cutting edge facilities and to provide financial aid and scholarship to attract the best students.

UK universities have historically had much smaller endowments, but have had to rely on more diversified funding streams. Research grants, government grants for teaching and research, and in Oxford's case, publishing income from Oxford University Press, to maintain their strong position. Excellence in universities, as in everything else, costs money. That is why, as head of a world class university, I spend a significant amount of my time fundraising. Ultimately, for all of us, properly managed endowments have to be a major focus for the future in order to provide that best, long term financial security.

So now, the four components of a world class university that I've described. Outstanding people, research excellence, high quality education, sustainable funding. These are indeed high hurdles. But when they are built up over many years, with care and commitment, they make world class universities truly wonderful places to work and important contributors to their economies and to their societies. Thank you.

MARGARET: Thank you to Professor Hamilton, for his illuminating address on the essential features of a world class university, drawing on the experience of Oxford, which indeed has many centuries of experience. Those of us here tonight, and many others, all have images and ideas about the dream inspired of Oxford, the city and the university. And many universities were founded and shaped in part in homage, and in part in imitation, of Oxford University's educational approach and traditions. Any Vice-Chancellor would be well advised to focus on the four features that Professor Hamilton outlined to underpin the excellence of their university. And as Professor Hamilton has indicated, it would be a poorer and less exciting world if all those universities decided that the only way to combine those features was to imitate Oxford.

For my part tonight, I want to consider not advice to Vice-Chancellors, knowing what a fractious group they are to give advice to, but to policy makers. The world has changed since those early days when concerned citizens in various cities in Australia established the first universities here.

As higher education has become more global, more widespread and more integral to the future of nations, a discussion about the relative standing of universities and national higher education systems has emerged into public debate and has become more intense. This particular concern is recycled in Australia and many other countries each time an international ranking of universities is released. It has fuelled commentary in many nations about how funding should be distributed to make sure their universities are in the top 100 of these lists.

These days, a place in those international rankings has become the de-facto marker of world class status. It has the appearance of objectivity, a score is attached, and it is accessible to all, not merely to those who are in the know. So it has gained salience for the responses of policy makers in higher education around the world. There are now many examples of changes to structure, to focus and to funding, in countries attempting to ensure that their universities are ranked as world class. I just want to make one point in my commentary tonight, listen up policy makers in Australia: for Australia, it should be a world class university system, not world class universities, that is their goal.

If you are ensuring a world class university rather than a world class university system if that was your goal, then concentration of public funding, and indeed all sorts of attention, might seem a plausible strategy. You might imagine that there should be a lighthouse. Let's call it a national university through which you would ensure your national world class quality. Indeed, there was a time in the 20th century when this was a broad policy objective.

I want to argue that in this world, as access to higher education and research becomes more widespread across the globe, Australian policymakers must worry about the scale and impact of our higher education and research as much as they worry about its quality. Concentration on high quality in a small proportion of a university system may be a very ... and indeed can be, a very successful strategy in a large system. For example China is investing in its top 100 universities to bring them to world class standard. And indeed many of them indeed are at world class standard.

Australia doesn't have 100 universities. In a small system of less than 40 universities, a strategy based on a small number of high quality and a long tail of underachievement is not likely to produce sufficient numbers of quality graduates or quality research for Australia to be a significant part of global higher education and research networks. And to be truly world class, to be truly world class, you must be part of global higher education and research networks. No comfort should be taken from having one or two or even three Australian universities, as we do, in the top 100 of an international ranking scheme. Let me just get you to think of these two images. I want you to imagine yourself, if there is a single team of world class eminent researchers in a particular field in Australia, will eminent researchers with no existing research links to that team from other countries choose to come and visit here, over the possibility of going to a region with a number of excellent teams with whom to collaborate? Or will it suffice that members of that excellent Australian team visit or are invited to visit those overseas hubs of research excellence?

If there is a single university with an excellent department or school in a field, will a student from another country choose that country and university over another country that has a number of excellent universities from which to choose in that same field? Let me suggest to you that if you were that overseas researcher, or group of overseas researchers, or that group of overseas students, I think we can imagine how that decision might play out in most cases, and it would not be to come to a place with a very small number of excellent universities over a place with much greater choice. Indeed we might ask how long we would keep Australian students in Australia for their higher education, particularly their postgraduate education, or those excellent researchers in Australia, when the opportunities of another larger system beckoned. If we worried only about some being world class, and not about a world class system.

Impact in higher education and research, in terms of attracting the interest and investment of industry whose research and research funding is global, depends on quality and on scale. Major investment in innovation does not typically flow to small pinpoints of high quality. Similarly, flows of international students are attracted to hubs of student diversity scale and quality.

At present among the many international rankings of universities published around the globe, Australia has somewhere between five and 10 universities in the top 100. But if you decided to compare our system and deflated for GDP or population, Australia's performance in the QS rankings is fourth, sharing this top four ranking with Hong Kong, Singapore, Switzerland and New Zealand. If you did that to the Shanghai Jiao Tong on 2007 data, you can find Australia is eleventh when adjustments are made. And on those measures of research quality in the Shanghai Jiao Tong, Australia is behind a number of other small countries such as Israel, Finland, Norway and Denmark. You might say from this information, that maybe that anxiety about performance that I've just outlined should be dismissed. Maybe size doesn't matter. But every one of these rankings is based on very lagged data. They do not yet capture the major investments and improvements in research performance happening in countries in the Asian region and their burgeoning educational quality. We cannot yet see the impact of improved quality, as well as scale on global networks of education and research for the coming decades.

So here's the rub. To have the impact that will keep Australian universities in touch with world class and education networks, Australia needs not only to maintain its current high quality education and research, it has to invest enough, that's a lot more, to be at the forefront. It has to invest enough so that more than three, or five, or even 10 universities have the research and educational scale to make Australia a significant part of these global networks for the future.

A F Davies commented that Australians have a characteristic talent for bureaucracy. An important manifestation of this has been in the policy design and performance schemes that exist in Australian higher education. This genius or talent can only take us so far. We can measure excellence, we can engineer schemes to find excellence, we can reward excellence. But fundamentally we cannot build excellence for the future without an appreciation of the scale of the investment a world class system needs. No Australian university will be truly great in future, will be truly world class, unless it finds itself in the company and in the competition of a world class system in this country.

Let me conclude by returning to our distinguished speaker's place. In 1952 John Cecil Masterman, who some five years later became Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, wrote a wonderful book, *To Teach the Senators Wisdom, or An Oxford Guide Book*. The story is ostensibly an attempt to capture for outsiders the essence of Oxford. And this story's digressions, discussions and omissions are a masterful walk through that emotional landscape. But this is the conclusion. The conclusion is that the essence or the secret of Oxford cannot be captured. That each of us sees it ... this is Masterman's words ... each of us sees us as it was, and he says when he was young. Each of us thinks that our successes should enjoy the things which we enjoy and admire what we admired. But that indeed, isn't it right, that every generation should live its own life and worship its own gods. For each individual, it is a different secret, and each must find it for himself.

And so I stop there to say, this one humbling thing from the wise words of J C Masterman, while I will defend to the death the notion that it is the system and the investment that's necessary for our world class nature, what I know in a humble way as a Vice-Chancellor and once an academic, is that the thing that we find it hardest to do, is to understand how those people before us, that new generation, how they will find it, how they will make it, what they will find in their stories that will make it really world class. Thank you.

JUDITH: Thank you very much and thank you very much to the Grattan Institute for inviting me to talk on this very interesting topic, and to be amidst such a distinguished array of Vice-Chancellors. I'm a head of school, so I work slightly lower down in the institution. And I thought that I would talk a little bit about that perspective, the perspective of someone ... I manage a school of about 70, where I ... so I spend a lot of my time working with the staff.

I'm also someone ... I'm an active researcher and an active writer. So I want to bring that perspective to this question of what it is that makes a world class university. And I want to I guess raise ... make a couple of points with you a little more sceptical, a little less enthusiastic about the idea of a world class university, because I think there are costs with the focus on world class-ness, which is a preoccupation with Australia. And I very much appreciate the sort

of argument that Margaret was putting forward about the need for us to look at a world class system.

I'm very uneasy I have to say with the term world class people, which was in ... which was used sometimes as a synonym for extraordinarily talented people. And in the Australian context it's very often this notion of world class is used as a synonym for excellence. Now I work in Australian history and politics, and much of the work and the research and the writing that's done on Australian politics and Australian history is in my judgement world class. That is it's really excellent, it's terrific. But those who do it can never be world class people in that way, they won't be global celebrities. In the main because much of the world is actually not very interested in Australia. Henry Reynolds does world class history in my judgement, but he's never going to have the world class status of somebody like Salman Sharma. He's not going to be a global celebrity historian, and I don't think any Australian historian ever will.

Now I'm sure similar points could be made about much of the natural and environmental science too which is very focused on things that are specific to Australia's ecological circumstances. So I think that Australia's got to be very careful with the emphasis on world class people and this sliding of world class into a synonym of excellence. But it doesn't discourage the best and brightest young Australians from tackling questions about Australia. There's a risk if you like of provincialising enquiry about Australia, of making it seem like an area that the sort of second-raters can go into, who can't quite cut it out there in the big, wide world.

I'd started my postgraduate education at Oxford in the early '70s, and I have to say I was completely miserable. I'm sure it's changed a lot now. I was homesick, I was a very inexperienced you know, immature young woman. And the world then was a much, much bigger place too. And I was at Oxford in '71-'72, and I was at Oxford when the Whitlam government was elected. And I remember paying my one pound a minute to ring up my parents to find out what was going on in Australia, and I think I rang Australia House and crying over the phone in this dingy place I was living in Oxford, hall of residents. And at that point I had a ... I basically for various reasons returned to Australia. And it was back ... in coming back to Australia that I found what has turned out to be my life's research work, which is writing about the history of the non-Liberal ... sorry non-Labour politics in Australia, and Australian political culture, Australian political history. And I think that's ... that there's ... so I guess I'm speaking out of that experience, of someone who's spent their research life trying to write excellent, world class work about Australia.

The second point that I want to make is that the focus on world class universities and the league tables that rank them, comes from a framework of competition in which institutions compete for the status world class. Now there's no doubt that competition is a great motivator of human beings. But it's not for everyone and it's not for everything. And as well as the structures which encourage and compel competition, much excellent academic work also depends on structures which enhance and support cooperation, both within and between institutions and I think we've heard something of that from the other two speakers.

But I want to just say a little bit more about that, to draw out that. First, between institutions. Academic disciplines have been created by the work of countless scholars, thinkers and writers and they continue to develop through cooperative endeavours. Through conferences where academics talk about ideas, through reviewing books, refereeing journal articles and grant applications, examining theses and so on. These are all ... these are things which in a way happen outside and beyond one's responsibilities to one's employing institution.

These academic disciplines too I think are very important resources for academics. Intellectually obviously, but I think they're also emotionally and psychologically important resources. With the pressures on contemporary universities particularly in Australia at the moment but for different ... but also in the United States and in the UK that are coming from various problems over funding, many academics will find themselves I think at some point in their careers in toxic workplaces. As the pressures coming in on universities and the periodic funding crises cause painful restructurings ... and I'm sure many people here have lived through those in various roles. Now I think the sense of participation in conversations that stretch beyond the institutions,

so like minds across the globe, and back in time, is very sustaining. So ... and so it's a very important resource I think for keeping our university systems vibrant.

The last point I want to say something about is cooperation within institutions, and this comes much more directly from my experience as a head of school. I was a ... in the 1980s I worked for five years as the editor of *Miengen*. And since then, I've been interested in the structures and processes that enhance and support intellectual creativity. And it's after all intellectual creativity that excellent research comes from. I've been interested in the space of a magazine, the quiet of a library or a study, the trust and collaboration of a research group, the creative buzz of intellectual friends. Now in universities, these spaces exist quite low down in the institution, far below the level of the Vice-Chancellors and the management. They exist really often at the level of the department or the research team, or the discipline. This is where the ideas happen and where the deep pleasure of academic work, both teaching and research, is most often experienced. These spaces work best I think when they're relatively free from anxiety, so that talented, committed people can focus on the intellectual tasks at hand, and contribute to the creation of a world class university system. And I think the real risk from our under-funded system is that it's becoming harder and harder. I mean I'm if you like a sort of middle management person and I think of myself as an umbrella, trying to in a sense protect the people in my school to some extent from anxiety so they can actually ... when they're a lot ... you know most of them are a lot younger than me, so that they can have that experience in their working academic life of being able to just focus on the teaching and their research. And I think it's becoming increasingly difficult to do that, because of the chronic under-funding of the Australian system.

This chronic under-funding is leading an emphasis on competition to be used for the distributing of scarce resources. So I suppose the point that I just want to leave with there is that I think we need in thinking about world class and what the benefits of that focus can be, to also just be a little bit cautious, because I think for a country like Australia, that's in many ways peripheral to some of the big questions that the northern hemisphere is concerned with, or that has its own questions that it wants to look at, there's costs with that and there's costs I think in competition driving out some of the structures of cooperation on which I think a world class university system depends on. Thank you.

GLYN: Well thank you for being here tonight. Thank you to your panel for the conversation and thank you to the Grattan Institute for organising this event. We need think tanks in this country to open up debate, and I'm delighted that Grattan has decided to launch a program on higher education. John, well done. I'd like to acknowledge the great generosity of the Myer Foundation in making that possible, and acknowledge Martin Myer, the Chair of the Foundation.

Now we're gathered here to hear from Andrew Hamilton, and in any case I find myself in furious agreement with much that's been said. So I intend to be very brief. But as leader of one of the great universities of the world, Professor Hamilton is rightly proud of his institution, as would be obvious. And the possibilities that it opens up, for staff, for students. People, as Margaret noted, have admired Oxford for nearly a millennium, and its example has been felt around the world, including here by the Yarra, when civic leaders in this town decided to set up their first university in 1853, they mandated that it be as much like Oxford as possible. And they insisted that all four founding professors be recruited from Oxford, just so there was no risk of that changing.

And those links in fact continue. Earlier today, Professor Hamilton and I met with Alan Myers QC and the two Deans, to celebrate the joint law programs now offered between Oxford and Melbourne. And yet, as Judith Brett and Margaret Gardener both argued, great scholars, great universities are typically found within national systems. It's hard to shine alone. The shepherd gets lonely in the field. Cambridge was founded by scholars unhappy with developments at Oxford, and that rivalry over hundreds of years has benefited both institutions. Professor Hamilton's previous home, Yale in New Haven, famously competes against other ivy league colleges. Great scholarship requires a community. An audience bigger than any one place. With the simultaneous competition and collaboration that marks academic life. No institution is entire and complete unto itself. We're all part of the main, made better by participating in something bigger than ourselves. And that's the conversation across disciplines and across institutional boundaries.

Melbourne is a better university because it shares the city with other fine tertiary institutions. And that's the virtue of being one amongst many. The disadvantage can be a sameness, that smooths out difference that takes away meaningful choice. As Andrew has noted, students should be empowered to select the education that works best for them and scholars should work at the institution that best supports their intellectual agenda. Australian practice, perhaps I suspect unconsciously, has instead emphasised consistency and similarity in our institutions. And I guess this mirrors an Australian preference for equality, so that students in Western Australia should have exactly the same opportunities as those in regional Queensland.

Through funding rules that are identical for every student and for every public university, policy reflects our preference for fairness. And as a result, Australian universities are much more alike than different. It's no coincidence that the reforms of 1990 set up what then Minister John Dawkins called a unified national system of higher education. And the interesting question is whether that approach remains viable in the world of choice and contestation.

Australia has a university system that delivers consistently high quality higher education, but limits the resources available for any one institution chasing international fame and glory. It's an outcome I suspect that suits the national temperament. Now some of this long established framework has been challenged by the 2009 Bradley Review, which is open to participation and changed regulation, and offered the possibility of new funding approaches through a review of base funding.

Yet listening to Andrew discuss the ingredients of a world class university, it seems less public policy than national culture that defines the possible. Australians may occasionally be proud of their universities, I certainly hope so. But there's no groundswell of popular opinion demanding world class universities. Indeed, where is the anxiety about rankings that you hear in Korea, in China, in France? Why do we not hear more from successful people whose education has made possible their careers, calling for greater support for the sector? Where are the politicians given their chances in life by school and university qualifications, pressing education as the great national priority?

Everyone here tonight shares a reverence for outstanding people, for great students, for research excellence, for high quality teaching and for sustainable funding. Let's hope the Grattan Institute project can build then an even larger audience for what people, research and teaching make possible at all world class universities, at Oxford and hopefully here in Australia. Thank you.

JOHN: Thank you, Glyn. As I mentioned we will now have an opportunity for questions. We do have a roving microphone somewhere at the background ... at the back, and whilst you're having a quick formulation of your question, perhaps I can exploit my position and ask the first one. Andy, many of our other speakers have spoken about the concept of a world class university system. Do you think that that's something that governments should be trying to encourage? And if so, what can governments do to make a world class university system more likely? Is it essentially about throwing money at the problem, or are there other things that they should be doing?

ANDY: Let me respond to a couple of the comments that were said the ... I was intrigued by the balance that came out in a number of the words from the other speakers about this balance of cooperation and competition, and in a sense, that's at the heart of your question John. And I would say certainly that while Glyn discussed the egalitarian impulse that has led to policy certainly in the last couple of decades in Australia leading to a sameness among institutions, in fact in the UK, that has ... there has been a similar impulse and a conversion of the polytechnics in the 1990s into universities was very much along that same line.

But in essence, it really was not the reality of higher education in the UK. There has always been differentiation in the sector. There have always been differences in the sector. Oxford and Cambridge, Imperial, UCL, Manchester, Liverpool, there have always been universities that have been more concentrated in the highest level and productivity and research. And I for one think that that diversity is a good thing. I think that the strength of a university sector can be

found in a sense in terms of an ecosystem, where different institutions are serving different functions. And certainly for me, one of the great strengths that I found working for many years in the United States, was indeed that was the case. It was quite recognised in a state like the one I worked in, Connecticut, that Yale had a particular place in the ecosystem. The state funded university, the University of Connecticut itself had an important regional New England role to play. But then other universities, Southern Connecticut State University, Western Connecticut State University. They had regional vitally important roles and were respected for those roles. And in fact, the sector in that state, and arguably expanding beyond that to all of the states in the US, the entire system was strengthened by the wide diversity of institutions fulfilling different national ... international, national and regional roles.

JOHN: Thank you. Perhaps we have a question from the floor. Please don't be shy. We have one over here, please. Thanks Angela. We were hoping for one from up the back first and we kind of guessed wrong. Just along here.

AUDIENCE: Hi, I just wanted to ask the panel, Andrew touched on it in his speech when he talked about access. And it touches on what you were talking about there about diversity and equality, the two things that Australia's struggling with and Australia's history of ... that we're all egalitarian and we contrast ourselves with the UK and say that isn't, it's class ridden. Which of course it's not, but I mean that's what I'm saying, that's the perceptions. So when we deal with universities which are still large ... well government funded still, not completely of course, but big role there. They have a role as ... in policy making as far as the government's concerned. And a lot of that role is about social mobility and ensuring it. And everyone agrees that we want this. How ... and I think partly why we're so egalitarian is about ... is that issue. How can we have a system that's equal, and ... but also diverse, but still ensure that diversity. I guess what I'm asking is, how can you be sure that when you say diversity, you're not sort of opening the door to elitism and class? How do you break that nexus?

JOHN: Glyn, you spoke about diversity, so I wondered if you'd like to go first.

GLYN: Thank you Andrew, thank you Andrew Trounsen from the Australian, thank you for the question. Interestingly we don't apply that logic to sport, which is where we started. Nobody's arguing that it's improper to have a team in London in 2012, because that would be unfair to all those people who are never going to make the Olympic team. I am, in brackets, delighted that London has adopted Nike, the Melbourne standard as its ... for all the medals, will all have Nike on them as per the University of Melbourne, so they've got some things right.

But it's interesting that we don't apply that to other areas of life, but we do firmly apply it to education 'cause we see education as having a role in equity that is fundamental. And that's a decision we came to only as universities became an important part of people's lives. Until the 1980s, somewhere less than 10% of Australians had university degrees, and we took it for granted that if you were in any of the professions you'd have a degree but nobody else would need one. And as that became less and less true, so we became to see this as an equity problem.

The fundamental issue is how can we replicate sport? How can we have thousands of people participating, lots of different leagues, lots of sense that you can play sport in many different ways, and yet say it's reasonable that some people are fabulous at this and do it well? One of the challenges for us I think as the sector, and I see this as our problem, not sort of someone else's, is we have to persuade people that it is possible to have diversity and equality. That you can have a system that opens up education to a vast number of people and yet also celebrate excellent and support it where it's found. And I think you're hearing from Judith, Margaret and I, all ... a variation on the same theme. But that isn't about picking one institution and saying all the resources should go there. I think we're all saying, excellence will be found in lots of different places, and it should be nurtured where it's possible rather than assumed that by centralising it in one place, that somehow you'll get a better outcome.

JUDITH: Can I make a comment on that? Because I'm always rather troubled by this use of the sport analogy, because sport is obviously about winning and losing. I mean that's what sport's about, that's its whole purpose you know. Well not its whole purpose, I'm not very keen on sport

myself. I know people like playing it, but I mean that's what it's about. And I think there's a real problem when sport is used ... I mean there's a certain point there, but intellectual work is much more complex than sport, and it's more varied and it's more unpredictable. And it's much harder actually to pick winners in that sense. You know, you can't really ... I mean I spent ... I'm sure anybody here who's been an academic has spent a lot of time sitting on recruitment panels trying to hire terrific people, trying to pick who are going to be the really talented people. It's incredibly difficult because everybody really you know, who gets an academic job in their 30s is pretty bright. But whether they end up by their 60s having made a significant contribution or not depends on a whole range of things to do with you know, the luck of their health, psychological, emotional intelligence, the way in which ... it's very ... I think it's a really big challenge managing a creative, productive research career over four decades. And many people start and a lot ... you know, for various reasons they do other ... they become good at other things. So I think it's much more complicated, and I think the sport analogy makes it look like it's much easier than it is.

MARGARET: Can I say something about diversity that I think we constantly forget. So I made an argument about a world class university system and every single one of those words was important. There are less than 40 universities in Australia. There are close to 200 higher education providers. There are over 1,500 vocational education providers. And the reason I focus on investment, and I don't only mean public, is because we've got some elements of the ... in Australia of the policy and system design relatively right. We're not as good as we should be at enabling people to start here and go there, but we're a lot better at it than a lot of other systems, and we've got a lot of the blocks in place, and we'll get a lot better at it, because the pressure on access and equity will cause us to be a hell of a lot more clever about that in the universities in the next few years. So that characteristic talent for bureaucracy, in system design and in systems that drive competitive performance, is actually I think probably not too bad. Competitive performance and competitive performance driving access, and in fact a more diverse system than we think. Because most of the people who turn up to these lectures have never spent any time in anything else other than a university. So they forget about all the other bits that are out there. But, it is an investment question. Because if you don't put more investment in, then all those bright, talented people that Judith's talking about, a whole lot of them we'll have to weed out at 25, because we've got to decide which one looks like the shooting star. And forget being a late bloomer, and that's the problem I'm worried about.

ANDY: I for one am looking forward to the next time the Wallabies come to Twickenham, and we see this egalitarian approach applied to the choice of the Australian rugby team.

MARGARET: No, no we're prepared to punch everybody once.

ANDY: I'm not ashamed, you used the word ... the questioner used the word elitism, and I'm not ashamed to use that word in connection with Oxford, when it's used exclusively for intellectual elitism. And I'm afraid I disagree with you that everyone has the same talent as a younger person and ...

JUDITH: No it's more that it's ... sorry go on.

ANDY: I think we see quite dramatically different skills and talents and impacts of scholarly work coming through in academic careers. And for me, one of the ... the history over the last 50 years of the economy of the United Kingdom and the economy of Australia and investment in higher education is remarkably similar. Look at the tuition funding in England, it looks remarkably similar to Australia's. Look at the research assessment in Australia, it looks remarkably similar to England's. But in fact it's a minor miracle that despite all of the assaults in UK higher education policy over the last 50 years, that the UK has by any measure two of the world's greatest universities. And the reason it does is because both of them have unashamedly focused on elitism in selection of students, based entirely on meritocratic consideration of student talent. And similarly, on the attraction of academic staff, of the very highest and best assessment of their quality. And I don't think that's something we should be ashamed of, I think it's something we should focus on and it's essential to really have that highest level of achievement of whatever form and whatever subject in a university.

JOHN: One here please, thank you.

AUDIENCE: Leisl Thomas from the Growth Areas Authority. We plan for new communities around Melbourne's fringe, and we want to make sure that they have access to world class universities, or a world class university system. In ... there's clearly not a lot of funds to build more of these things, so can you comment on how people will access these places? Are you seeing them as a place or is there a role for online learning and other types of delivery that don't involve people travelling to these places?

ANDY: Let me ... from the perspective of Oxford, certainly ... of course the strength of a university like Oxford and indeed the University of Melbourne is the extent to which we make open and accessible many of the great treasures, the glories of the university. That includes our museums, that includes our libraries, that includes many of our resources. It also includes a good deal of our education, and so there's ... certainly in Oxford's case we've been investing significantly over the last many years in the kind of online delivery of academic content. Now it's not in the form of online degree programs, because that's something that certainly we haven't successfully developed, and I doubt if we ever will, because that tutorial system that's at the heart of Oxford is an awfully hard thing to reproduce online. But certainly in the provision of lectures, in the provision of academic materials, those have been very heavily invested in and been a major focus in the last many years.

JOHN: Yeah, would you like to ...

JUDITH: I was just going to say one of the big differences I think between the United Kingdom and Australia is that in Australia people don't like leaving home to go to university, which is very different than the ... the experience in the United Kingdom. So that there is this demand in Australia for university education to be delivered to where you live. And I think that's particular to us and it raises a ... poses particular challenges to our system. Similarly in the United States, people leave home and they typically go somewhere else to go to university.

JOHN: Thank you. I'm sure ... unfortunately we're running out of time, so I'm ... we'll have to call proceedings to an end at this point. For those people who'd like to check their footnotes, this evening's presentation will be available from Grattan Institute's website in a couple of days time, where it'll be available both as a podcast and there will also be a transcript.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank a number of people. Grattan Institute's founding members, the Commonwealth of Australia, the state of Victoria, the University of Melbourne and BHP Billiton. I'd like to acknowledge our institutional affiliates, particularly National Australia Bank, Stocklands and Wesfarmers. And of course, the supporters of our new higher education program, the Myer Foundation. And between all of those institutions, they have made this evening's event possible and the work of Grattan Institute possible, and we'd like to thank them for their support. It wouldn't happen without them.

I'd like to thank the staff of Grattan Institute, the staff of the Vice-Chancellor's Office at the University of Oxford, and the staff of Federation Square for their efforts in making tonight at least appear seamless. And finally can I ask you all to join me in thanking our speakers for this evening, Professors Andrew Hamilton, Margaret Gardener, Judith Brett and Glyn Davis. Thank you very much.

AUDIO: This has been a podcast from Grattan Institute. Want to hear more? Check out our website, www.grattan.edu.au.

End of recording