

Report for NUPSA Inc. Executive Committee

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Position: International Representative

Date: 28/02/2017 – 01/03/2017

Meeting or Activity: Universities Australia Conference

Date: 28/02/2017

Description of Activity:

The first day of the conference began with the registration at National Convention Centre, the venue for the conference. The conference began with the welcome to the country. The theme for this year's conference was "Future Fundamentals". Staying with the theme the keynote address was on the future workforce. The Hon. Bruce Reed talked about what will be the future of the workforce in the universities and how with the changing environment and technological advances the workforce will adapt and change accordingly. However, it could have been an important session, the regular discussion on Artificial Intelligence stole the show and lead to the keynote address become more about speculation and not anything interesting.

After the morning tea the first plenary was on Dispelling Dystopia. Another session that focused more on artificial intelligence. The first presentation in this session was on AI, Automation and Future. Some interesting facts from that presentation are that Australia has the most automated vehicles in the world and also that almost 40% of the jobs change in the near future because of automation. Now this 40% change will require upskilling of the current workforce for which universities should be ready to put forth courses and trainings that can ease this transition. There will not be a loss of job but the adaptation due to technological advancement. Also currently all the AI we see around is weak AI and the strong AI which everyone is worried about is still a long way from being developed.

The second presentation was on Putting AI in place. The third presentation was on Dispelling Dystopia about AI. This presentation talked about the various fields where AI is currently being used and how it has helped humanity. AI is used in biomedical sciences to search for drug efficiency, detecting meteors, development of smart campuses, cities, etc and wearable sensors to reduce the risk of injury to professional athletes. The final presentation was on Technology as a game changer.

The next on the itinerary was sectoral sessions and I decided to attend the one named CISA NUS CAPA NATSIPA – Employability and curriculum designed by the future. It is good to see that UA is inviting student leaders to be on the panel at such a huge conference. However, in saying that the timing of the session was not appropriate as most of the university people were away for the National Press Club Address. On the panel all the student leaders were assumed to be in a futuristic DVC role in their futuristic university. Once they had assumed their respective futuristic roles, they were asked why they chose that particular role and what they would do at their campuses. It felt like a mere courtesy session for students as there was nothing in the session that could have educated the university people or current and future student leaders.

After lunch, we had concurrent sessions as well and I decided to attend stream B – Nothing about us without us: Student as Partners. The first speaker was VC of University of East Anglia in UK. He talked about his university and how he works with students for the better of everyone. The interaction and work is so good that it has been regularly ranked as one of the universities with highest satisfaction and security among students. He regularly works with students to get valid solutions for the problems that crop up at the university.

The next speaker was from UTS Sydney and she talked about her research that she had carried about collaborative work with students at the university. She mentioned that ideal time for having meaningful partnerships with students has come. She also mentioned that at times universities believe that international students do not involve much with university admin and associations since they are more focused on their study but she was gladly proven wrong during the 2017 CISA conference where she was flooded with questions after her presentation there.

The outgoing University of Queensland Union President gave the last presentation. She talked about her experience of working with the university and showed how by working together really good and progressive work can be carried out.

During the afternoon tea, the Minister for Education and Training gave the ministerial address. He started by talking about the elephant in the room – Budget or budget cuts to the universities. There was not a lot of force and body to his speech and just a mere reference that the government is always working with the universities.

The final session of the day were concurrent as well and I attended stream I – International Education: What Next? The main point of discussion during the session was how do we adapt to change. Australia is at a very important juncture since the Trump presidency and Brexit have caused the student numbers to drop in US and UK. As most international students prefer to study in an English speaking country, Australia and to some extent Canada are the beneficiaries and seeing student numbers rise year after year. China and India are the major players in international education and these two are the ones that are investing the most in international education.

After a much disappointing day I got dressed to attend the gala dinner at the Parliament House.

Meeting or Activity: Universities Australia Conference

Date: 01/03/2017

Description of Activity:

The second day began with the opposition address given by Shadow Minister Tanya Plibersek. Compared to the ministerial address the previous day, it was a much welcome change. She was the first person who mentioned the SA/SH review which was released last year. In a hidden message, she also called out UoN colleges that were recently in the news for all the bad reasons. She also mentioned that the things have moved too slowly due to the regular attacks on the universities carried out by the government. At this juncture her speech was interrupted by one gentleman in the crowd who asked her 'Why is she not preventing Adani to carry out mining in Queensland?' She politely replied to the gentleman that she respects the individual right to freedom of speech but it would not be right to reply on that topic currently as she is giving a speech on another topic and she will be more than happy to answer his questions personally after her speech in another forum.

After her address we had the first plenary with the topic – Global impact of Brexit on Research. The President elect of Royal Society of Edinburgh was the speaker. She mentioned how with brexit there will be a loss of quality, quantity and ability to work seamlessly in a global environment. However, this loss for the UK will be a gain for other English speaking countries and Australia is one of them. Hence, the professors should be ready to have a lot more collaborative works and increase the quality of research currently carried out.

The next session were concurrent sessions and I attended Stream O Health Workforce Future Fundamental: Where are we going? Where we are now? It was an informative session but would have benefited a health science student. After the completion of the session I checked up with the CAPA President if I should have attend the session on Improving Student Life, as she had attended that session, but she said it was as completely useless session as there was nothing in the session that we as student leaders would not know.

The preliminary session of the day was a plenary on 'Maintaining core values while staying ahead of disruption'. The speakers were former Australia Post CEO and current VP and Head of HR for Asia Pacific Cisco Systems. The former AU Post CEO mentioned about the overhaul that he had to carry out at AU Post with the changing times and automation of the world. Without making any of the 10,000 jobs redundant, he transformed the AU post from the loss making to a profit making business again. Whereas the VP from CISCO talked about the evolving workforce. She mentioned how her company is currently fighting for talent with upcoming start-ups. She also mentioned that with the evolving technology, her staff also needs to continuously upskill to remain viable in the market. Not only they need to be technologically advanced but also need to be able to work in the global environment since most of their working is online and with people across the world.

The closing plenary of the conference was 'In conversation with VC, University of Melbourne, VC and President, University of Newcastle and VC and President, Griffith University'. Since all the three VC's are due to retire this year, it was a mere reflection of their career. Soon after the session the conference was officially closed by the current chair of Universities Australia.