From the director...

TEACHING, learning and research are often referred to as the core fundamental business operations of a university. What is often not included in this business matrix is the responsibility of universities to engage in public policy debate.

The Federal Education Minister, in a recent speech to the Knowledge Transfer and Engagement Forum, referred to the notion of an ‘engaged university’ arguing that engagement should already be integral to the core purpose of a university.

An example of such engagement was the contribution universities made, via public commentary and debate on topical issues to public policy. Such engagement gives us an opportunity to make a major contribution to the economic and social development of our nation and it is a role the Australian Technology Network of Universities believes is critical.

This “thought leadership” is crucial, particularly in areas of contentious policy debate, such as the current discussion surrounding Australia’s future energy sources. To that end, the ATN will be hosting a national energy conference in Canberra later this year.

The conference, “Nuclear Energy: Impossible or Inevitable: How Does Australia make an informed decision?” will place the ATN at the core of one of Australia’s most important and controversial debates in decades.

As the national leading technology universities, we are well placed to play a significant role in facilitating this critical debate, which is very much aligned to one of the key tenets of the ATN – working at the technology/community interface.

Using the collective intellectual resources of the ATN, this conference will bring together leaders of industry, politics, social sciences and interest groups to examine the myriad of issues involved in making an informed decision. Universities have a critical role to play in such debates of national significance.

The nuclear power debate must be conducted at all levels in the community with openness and strong and worthy contributions from all stakeholders and it must consider the range of alternative energy sources. The ATN believes this debate to be so critical across all levels of the community that it should be harnessed independently of the political process in a format that allows for full and fearless constructive debate. There are myths to be dispelled and concerns to be expressed, there are investment and market opportunities to be explored, and we need also to learn from the experiences of those who already live with nuclear.

We are enthused to moving this debate on from polarising politics to free dialogue and learning. Learning all there is to know about a subject before making an informed decision is what Universities are about.

We intend that this conference be the first step of the ATN’s involvement in assisting Australia reach a conclusion – either for or against nuclear energy. For information on the conference, visit www.atn.edu.au
Impact on Australia’s future

IN response to the Government’s establishment of the RQF Development Advisory Group (RQFDAG), the ATN has pulled together a high level team from across the Network’s five universities, to examine how research impact is defined and, critically, measured.

Building upon the work undertaken by the ATN, (together with Murdoch University) in which more than 700 researchers participated in a trial RQF, the ATN impact group is working to develop a robust set of impact measures.

The ATN trial collected more than 200 case studies of impact to provide us with an evidence-based system for evaluating impact.

Impact, how it is measured and subsequently funded will form a critical component of the final research funding model adopted by Government.

Federal Education Minister Ms Julie Bishop, in a speech to the Knowledge Transfer and Engagement forum held in Sydney in June, acknowledged that whilst contentious, the assessment of research impact would ensure a “research evaluation measure that will greatly surpass those of other nations”.

Ms Bishop went on to say that there needed to be a shift in focus toward research which “really does have an impact on day to day life”. As universities with a strong emphasis on applied and impact driven research, we concur!

And as the only university group to conduct such a widespread trial across the nation, we believe we are well placed to assist in the development of a suitable set of national measures of impact.

A critical part of the ATN Impact Working Group’s outcomes will be to provide a ‘national’ view of impact that will be applicable across the entire higher education sector.

The ATN trial RQF taught us a lot about measuring research impact and we learnt just as much about what doesn’t work when measuring impact as we did about what does.

The feedback that we have from our assessment panels, which included external experts from business and industry, has given us some extremely useful insights on the best way to go about this whole process. With results currently undergoing international assessment, this trial has produced some robust outcomes.

Applied research, designed to produce a direct impact on the community, is a strong focus for the ATN and we are committed to helping the Government develop an RQF which will place Australia at the forefront in research evaluation.
Australian research in a global context

The ATN is sponsoring the Inaugural Congress of the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS), to be held at the Sofitel Brisbane from Tuesday, August 22 to Friday, August 25, 2006. The Congress, titled “Internationalisation of Research: The Big Issues and Opportunities of the Decade for Research Leaders and Managers” will be an international event and is hosted by the Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS).

The ATN strongly supports this event, as it links with one of the key characteristics of the ATN – namely our strong international focus both at the student level and in our research capacity. International students comprise almost 30% of the ATN’s total student body, and we have a high focus on international partnerships.

The INORMS Congress will be of interest to research administrators and managers, researchers and trainee researchers, and to policy makers involved in the conduct of research in a global context.

For more information, please visit http://www.inorms2006.com/

Vital contribution recognised

AFTER leading the ATN’s flagship executive development program for nine years, Dr Colleen Chesterman will retire from her position in August. When it first began in 1996, the Women’s Executive Development (WEXDEV) Program was a landmark project for the ATN.

Close collaboration between ATN Universities was not yet a regular occurrence and the project was a real test of our abilities to work together as a Network. Now, a decade later, WEXDEV has established an extremely strong extended network of senior women in the ATN who have benefitted both personally and professionally from its programs.

Quite apart from the direct involvement in the careers of ATN women, WEXDEV has also contributed to issues surrounding women in higher education that we had not originally anticipated. The outstanding success of WEXDEV could not have been achieved without the expertise that Dr Chesterman has contributed as its National Director.

The ATN e-Grad School (Australia) (eGSA) is patterned around these very principles, providing online, postgraduate award qualifications in research commercialisation and research management. (For more information on eGSA, please visit http://www.egradschool.edu.au/)

With our strong history of supporting knowledge transfer from universities to business and industry, the ATN highly recommends this conference to anyone interested in furthering their knowledge in successful commercialisation strategies.

Maintaining course quality a priority

IN a ground-breaking initiative designed to ensure the highest quality of Australia’s university courses, the ATN will soon be undertaking a pilot program to “teach the teachers”.

The program, which will target university course and unit co-ordinators, has been recognised by the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, with an enabling grant to undertake the national pilot project.

The Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching grant recognises that ATN universities are constantly striving to ensure the highest levels of academic experience for students.

The ATN has found that nationally there is little being done in this area – yet it is critical to the final outcomes of the kinds of courses we deliver and their quality.

This pilot, which will initially be run out of Curtin University in WA, will target those senior academics responsible for oversight of course offerings.

The end goal is to ensure the quality of our teaching remains of the highest standard, which in turn will benefit our students.

It is hoped that upon completion of the project, it can be adapted for use across the entire Australian higher education sector.
Clare Burton Lecture to examine fair work regime

The ATN is pleased to announce that the 2006 Clare Burton lecturer is Professor Barbara Pocock, Director of the Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia.

The lecture is entitled “Jobs, Care and Justice: A Fair Work Regime for Australia”.

Barbara Pocock has been investigating work in Australia for over 25 years. Since 2003, with the award of a five-year Queen Elizabeth Fellowship, she has been analysing the nature of the fit (or misfit) between work, home and community in Australia.

She has also undertaken research on vocational education, low pay, casual work, long hours, gender pay inequality, the politics of unions, industrial relations, gender and work, employment and work and family.

She joined the University of South Australia in 2006 to establish the Centre for Work + Life, as part of the Hawke Research Institute for Sustainable Societies.

The lectures are hosted by the ATN in each mainland state of Australia. A lecture is also scheduled for Canberra under the joint sponsorship of four ACT universities: Australian Defence Force Academy, Australian National University, Australian Catholic University and University of Canberra.

For further information on dates in your State please visit www.atn.edu.au

THE Australian Technology Network brings together five of the most innovative and enterprising universities in the nation.

We are committed to forging partnerships with industry and government to deliver practical results through focused research.

We educate graduates who are ready to enter their chosen profession, dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and eager to claim a stake in building sustainable societies of the future.

ATN universities teach around 180,000 students, or almost 20% of Australia’s student population. With 1 in 4 international students choosing to study at an ATN university, we are also the largest provider of international education, both with our onshore and offshore students.

The ATN’s aim is to help secure Australia’s reputation as the clever country, and contribute to its social and economic wealth, while championing the principles of access and equity that have ensured its members are the universities of first choice for more students.

For more information about the ATN, our organisation and activities, please visit our web site at http://www.atn.edu.au