

## PRESS RELEASE – Academics Critical of University Management, But Still Satisfied.

According to a recent national survey, Australian academics are satisfied with their jobs as academics but are critical of the management of their universities.

They are particularly critical of top-down management styles, cumbersome administrative processes and inadequate internal communication systems

These findings come from a joint University of New England and Australian Council for Educational Research national study on the state of the academic profession, led by Professor Lynn Meek, Associate Professor Leo Goedegebuure and Dr Jeannet van der Lee from UNE's Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy and Dr Hamish Coates of ACER.

The study is the largest ever of its kind, being part of an international comparative project across some 20 countries, namely Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China/Hong Kong, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States of America and Venezuela. It is a follow-up to the early 1990s project carried out under the auspices of the US Carnegie Foundation of which Australia was a part. Some 1,250 academics from 21 institutions participated in the on-line survey conducted in late 2007.

According to Associate Professor Leo Goedegebuure, one of the research leaders, respondents scored highly on the direct satisfaction question, whilst only 12 per cent indicate 'low' or 'very low' job satisfaction. This picture is confirmed by strong disagreement with the statement 'If I had to do it over again, I would not become an academic' and an almost neutral score on the statement that their current job is a source of considerable personal strain.

Professor Goedegebuure commented 'These survey results are all the more remarkable when we take into account the fact that many Australian academics are of the opinion that working conditions in higher education have deteriorated. Almost two thirds of the respondents believe that this is the case. Only some nine per cent feel that working conditions have improved since the start of their career.'

This deterioration does not appear to be related to the physical facilities provided by Australian institutions. Classrooms, laboratories, research equipment, office space and computer and telecommunications facilities are not considered poor, whilst library facilities and services are perceived as good. Academics are more critical when it comes to secretarial support, teaching support staff, and research support staff.

Academics spend quite a few more hours on their work than what they are contractually obliged to do. Irrespective of whether classes are in session or not, on average they spend 50 hours per week on their jobs.

When classes are in session, obviously a good deal of time is spent on teaching, though they still find time to do research. Administration throughout the year takes up close to 20 per cent of their time. When classes are not in session, research activities increase, although some time still is devoted to teaching.

The study will provide the opportunity to benchmark Australian academic views and experience with that of key competitor nations. Such international comparative analysis will help develop a better understanding of the uniqueness as well as the commonalities of Australian academe.

For further information contact: Dr Jeannet van der Lee: [chemp@une.edu.au](mailto:chemp@une.edu.au); 02 6773 2091; a summary is available from <http://www.une.edu.au/pdal/research/chemp/projects/cap>