

# Advertising change

## The distribution of new jobs in Australian universities

**Alec McHoul**

*Everybody has a view about what's happening to university hiring policies - and it's often a bleak one. But it's generally hard to tie down the facts. Alec McHoul surveyed all the new job advertisements for the second half of 2004. As you might expect, change is in the air.*

This paper is a very preliminary report<sup>1</sup> on data collected on new university positions (academic and administrative-managerial) advertised in the *Australian Higher Education* supplement on every Wednesday in the last two quarters of 2004. As a preliminary report only, it cannot deliver on all possible findings from the data. Its aim is more modest than that: to get at least an intuitive picture of Australian universities' disciplinary and managerial priorities during the period, especially in the light of the much-touted fact that expenditure on salaries is by far the highest call on all universities' funds today.<sup>2</sup> To that extent, at least, new expenditure on salaries ought to give us a general picture of what constitutes importance in the sector today.

The data were initially collected from the published advertisements under the following categories: (1) date of advertisement; (2) university; (3) discipline or management field; (4) notes on any special terms and conditions such as the limited period of the appointment or its fraction.<sup>3</sup> By far the most problematic of these categories was the second, the discipline area; and this for a number of reasons. Firstly, the hybrid disciplines (such as Business Law, History of Art and so forth) had to be classified in one discipline field or another, as did, secondly, those sub-disciplines that can have quite different meanings depending on their host fields (such as Criminology which can vary a great deal between Law schools and the social sciences in a broader sense). When in doubt, a classification was made on the basis of either (1) checking the related website for more information<sup>4</sup> or (2) taking my cue from the department, school or faculty base for the advertised position.

At the initial point of collection - though in retrospect this turned out to be something of a mistake - I tried to be as "true" to each advertisement itself as possible, having a definite suspicion that the traditional DEST discipline clusters had well outlived their day and could be of minimal use in attaining a picture of the disciplinary mix in late-2004 Australia.<sup>5</sup> This meant that, at the next stage of making sense of the data, I was left in a situation of having great banks of positions simply labelled 'Medicine' and 'Business'. To be sure, I still have the raw data for Physiology, Anatomy, General Practice, Clinical Supervision, etc. (re Medicine) and also for Accounting, Management, Finance, Banking, etc. (re Business), but my initial categorical sort (and the subsequent calculations based on them) lost those sub-data. Hence Medicine and Business corresponded to DEST clusters 06 (Health) and 08 (Management & Commerce) almost exactly but en bloc, while, for example, with respect to cluster 01 (Natural & Physical Sciences), I had preserved separate data for Biological Sciences, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy and unspecified General Science. This skews the present preliminary report somewhat and, in the fullness of time, I will need to go back and disaggregate at least clusters 06 and 08. No doubt this is a case of analyst bias: I have barely any knowledge or experience of either Business or Medical Studies while I have a broad range of experience in the social sciences and humanities and passing knowledge of the traditional natural sciences. I could simply 'see' that Classics was not to be grouped with Law while I could not 'see' that Finance was not to be grouped

with Accounting or that Physiology was not to be grouped with Anatomy. I beg my colleagues' forgiveness.

Here, then, are the initial disciplinary (plus administrative) fields that I used to code the raw data:

ANT .....Anthropology, Archaeology	LIB .....Librarians
ARC .....Architecture, Urban Planning	MAT .....Mathematics, Statistics
ART .....Art, Fine Art, Design	MED .....Medical Sciences, Health, Pharmacy, Dentistry
ASI .....Asian Studies	MES .....Media Studies, Multimedia, Film,
AST .....Astronomy	Communication Studies
AUS .....Australian Studies	MUS .....Music
AVI .....Aviation	NUR .....Nursing, Midwifery, Paramedics
BIO .....Biological Sciences	PHI .....Philosophy
BUS .....Business Disciplines (Marketing, Accounting, Finance, Management etc)	PHY .....Physics
CHE .....Chemistry	POL .....Politics, International Studies
CIT .....Computing & IT	PSY .....Psychology
CLA .....Classics	RES .....Research: unspecified discipline
CUL .....Cultural Studies	SAD .....Senior Administration (HEW9 to 10 and above)
DAN .....Dance	SCI .....Science: unspecified discipline (eg science communication)
ECO .....Economics	SOC .....Sociology, Social Work, Development Studies
EDU .....Education	SPO .....Sports Science, Sports Studies, Human Movement
ENG .....Engineering	TAD .....Theatre and Drama
ENL .....English, Creative Writing	THE .....Theology, Divinity
ENV .....Environmental Sciences, Geography, Geology, Forestry, Marine Science	TSP .....Teaching Support
HAT .....Hospitality and Tourism	VET .....Veterinary Sciences, Zoology
HIS .....History	WOM .....Women's Studies, Gender Studies
IND .....Indigenous Studies	
JAD .....Junior Admin (HEW1 to 8)	
JNL .....Journalism	
LAN .....Languages, Linguistics	
LAW .....Law; Policing, Justice and Legal Studies	

These field classifications show an obvious preference for dissecting the natural science, social science and humanities disciplines into recognised separate fields, while leaving other areas (especially Business and Medicine) undifferentiated. It was a mistake in the first phase of the breakdown; but I believe some valuable insights can still be gained. And the only way to do that reasonably fairly was then to return the data to their DEST clusters, reporting sub-clusters where possible, but skipping them where the aggregated data did not allow (again, especially re Business and Medicine). This was my first methodological decision. As we shall see, it led to some interpretative difficulties and biases down the track.

My second methodological decision was that sheer totals of advertised jobs for any area did not say very much at all.

Chart 1 shows sheer totals for each of the discipline fields. Perhaps Medicine and Business are appearing here by virtue of my initial policy of non-differentiation, as an artefact of my method for classifying fields. It's impossible to tell. As a consequence, I decided to go back and weight each advertised position, rather than just count the number of advertisements in each field. I settled on a weighting scale from 1 to 100, taking the recognised career grade (Senior Lecturer, level C) as the mid point (C=50). I then slotted in the established academic grades at even points on the scale (A=10. B=30, C=50, D=70, E=90) and added HEW positions around these according to average published salaries. I reserved 100 for "super" positions above the professorial level (mostly very senior university managers). If a position was fractional, I divided accordingly. If a position was for less than 5 years, I halved its score. Thus, at the extremes, a half-time level A position in Art History (on a two-year contract) scores 2.5, while a 5-year or unlimited Vice-Chancellorship scores 100.

Feeding these weightings back into the data, Chart 2 looks somewhat distinct, but confirms my suspicions about the relative values of Medicine and Business (now reversed in priority), Senior Administration and to a lesser extent, Education as current priority areas. With the above methodological concerns in mind, it is then worth looking at how all this pans out according to the 12 DEST clusters. These are as follows, with a 13th cluster I had to add for university management-administration, etc.:

<i>DEST Clusters</i>	<i>Weighted Scores</i>
Health (06)	13973.0
Society & Culture (09)	12524.0
Management & Commerce (08)	10567.5
University Management & Admin (13)	10481.5
Natural Sciences (01)	4059.5
Engineering (03)	2773.5
Information Technology (02)	2271.0
Creative Arts (10)	2267.5
Agriculture & Environment (05)	2032.0
Architecture (04)	697.0
Mixed (12)	350.0
Tourism & Hospitality (11)	85.0

What we see here is a reverse artefact of clustering all discipline fields. That is, cluster 09, Society & Culture, now comes to the fore simply because it contains such a plethora of (in fact, on the ground) utterly different disciplines. The disciplinary fields (from my data) corresponding to cluster 09 are no less than the following 17 (!) in their order of weighted scores, highest to lowest:

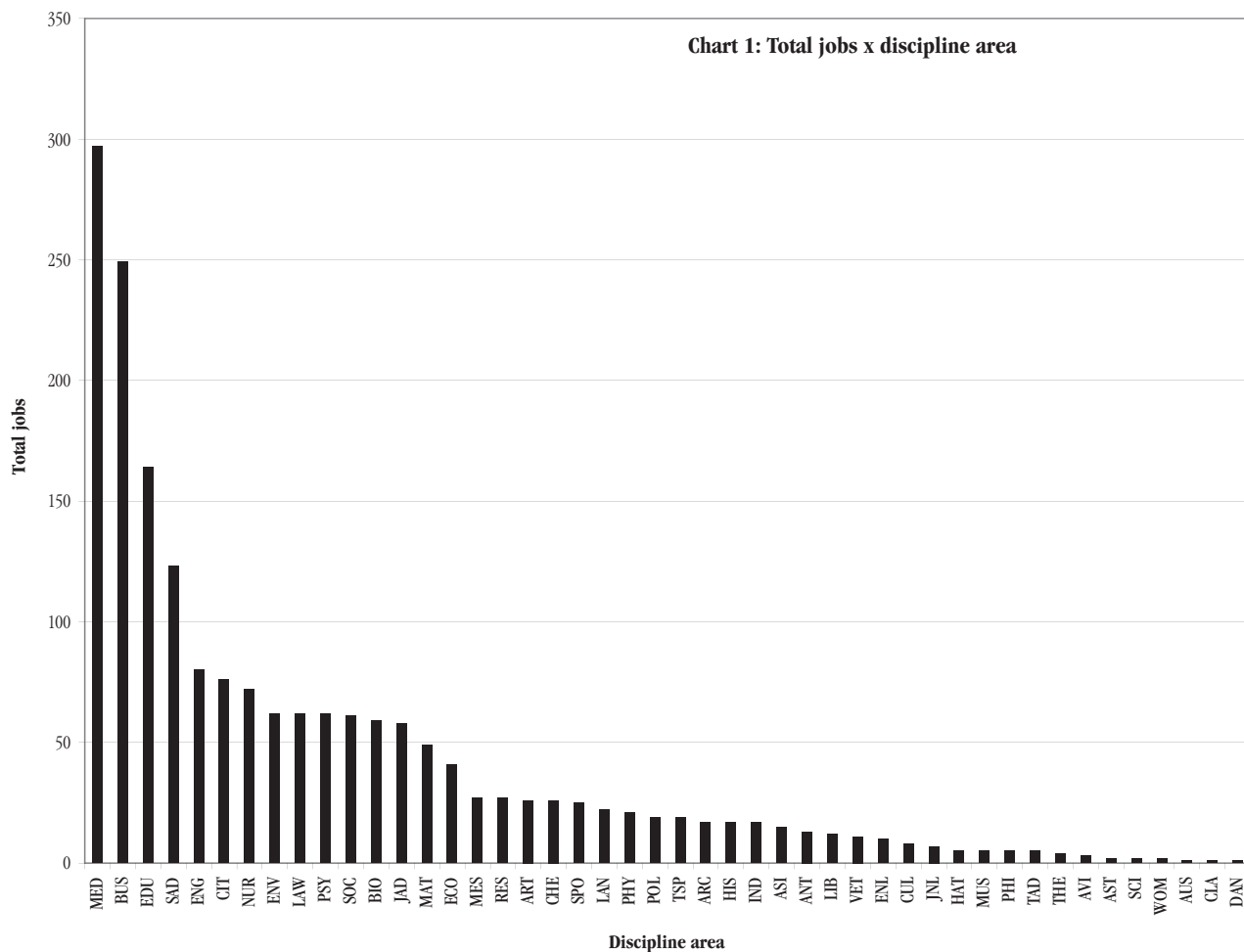
<i>Fields</i>	<i>Weighted Scores</i>
LAW Law, Policing Studies, Justice Studies, Legal Studies	2625.5
PSY Psychology	2249.0
SOC Sociology, Social Work, Development Studies	2142.0

ECO	Economics	1773.0
POL	Politics, International Studies	692.5
IND	Indigenous Studies	640.0
LAN	Languages, Linguistics	422.5
ANT	Anthropology, Archaeology	358.0
HIS	History	334.0
ASI	Asian Studies	285.0
ENL	English, Creative Writing	265.0
THE	Theology, Divinity	210.0
CUL	Cultural Studies	207.5
PHI	Philosophy	175.0
AUS	Australian Studies	70.0
WOM	Women's Studies, Gender Studies	55.0
CLA	Classics	20.0

And the DEST sub-clusters include quite a few more than just these fields. Intuitively, and from experience of how universities are organised today, I can see sense in clustering Finance, Accounting, Banking etc., just as I can see sense in clustering Physiology, Anatomy and General Practice (if not Nursing and Dentistry). These areas tend to have their own schools or faculties nowadays - sometimes even their own

campuses. But then, almost universally, so does Law and, to an extent, Psychology (the big 'winners' in cluster 09). So some tentative conclusions then.

1. The DEST clusters may need radical revisiting if they are to be used for the purposes of understanding how universities actually work today. Economics and Linguistics, for example, ought not to be grouped together with each other, let alone with Law and Psychology. Clustering into such general areas as Medicine (Health) and Business Studies (Management & Commerce) makes some real sense but cluster 09, at least on my reading, makes no sense at all. Until this can be sorted, it is going to be very hard to make sense of disciplinary priorities across the sector generally. The Nelson reforms more than merely suggest a much stronger Federal oversight of disciplinary distributions of student places based on national priorities, but these are going to be hard to track until we can achieve more realistic, clusterings reflecting 21st century international disciplinary formations.<sup>6</sup>
2. The Howard Government's attempts to make Nursing and Education priority areas of training (based on real or perceived shortages in those professions) have been very suc-



cessful in prompting universities to make appointments in those areas – particularly in Education. Government policy, whether correct or not, is having its effects on actual university expenditure.

- It's hard to get the actual figures across the sector, but much anecdotal evidence suggests a shift of priorities and funding from the 'chalk face' to administration. The data shown in the table in endnote 2 are inconclusive on this. They show a drop in *both* academic and non-academic salaries (between 1996 and 2003) as percentages of total budgets; though it would be interesting to know which specific kinds of jobs are being counted as which in the AVCC data; and also to get some detailed information on the increasing category of 'other expenses'. Still the job advertisement data collected here do, to some extent, show an appetite for the continued prioritising of management and administration positions: both in terms of raw numbers and as weighted items.

The last two quarters of 2004 may only give us a snapshot of where the current emphasis lies and, as stressed, the methodology of this survey is beleaguered with indecision about where to place many new positions on the disciplinary array. But both of these limitations are, in themselves, at least intuitive indicators of institutional change. New disciplines (indeed hybrid disciplines) have emerged and new alignments suggest a rethinking of clusters with possible funding consequences, especially as the move towards a federally-based system gathers momentum. A marked trend towards vocation-based disciplines appears to be continuing. There is some evidence that university management and administration continues to remain a funding priority – not surprising, after all, when one

considers who makes the decisions about funding priorities. And finally, just as vocationalism is in the ascendancy, the traditional university disciplines (particularly in the humanities and natural sciences) are losing their once-dominant positions. Or, at least they are losing their *advertised* positions.

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**Endnotes**

- There will be a further report, once I have crunched the numbers, on disciplinary (and administrative) priorities by particular named universities.
- The percentage breakdown of expenses, 1996 to 2003 for all Australian universities combined is available at the AVCC's website ([www.avcc.edu.au](http://www.avcc.edu.au)). The pertinent information is as follows:

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>University Expenses</b>								
Academic Staff	34%	33%	32%	32%	32%	31%	31%	29%
Non-Academic Staff	29%	29%	29%	28%	28%	27%	27%	25%
Other expenses	37%	38%	39%	40%	40%	41%	43%	46%

- This does not include jobs offered offshore (eg NZ) or PhD scholarships. Posts at CSIRO and related bodies are counted in the total.
- It's of minor interest, but it is becoming increasingly impossible to make sense of job ads. without web access. Most universities have excellent webpages expanding on the often meagre information in the published advertisements — understandable given the costs of ad-placing. In some cases, however, there is an odour of misrepresentation. On many an occasion when referring to websites, I came across specific terms and conditions, such as fractional or limited-term offerings, that did not appear in the printed text. The newspaper itself, if not the legislature (or perhaps the AVCC?), ought to set some standards with respect to the minimum amount of information a print ad. should contain.
- These 'clusters' are technically known as the 'Higher Education Discipline Groups', the top level of which are the 12 'Broad Discipline Groups' (aka 'branches of learning').
- This perhaps explains why most Australian universities have their own internal variations for clustering disciplines.

**Chart 2: Weighted value x discipline area**

