

# DRAFT STATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS FOR AUSTRALIAN ACADEMICS

Feb 17, 2022

Presentation to the Annual Conference of  
the Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)

On behalf of the AAUP Ethics Working party:

John Kenny (Convenor), Michael Bird, Jill Blackmore, Robyn Brandenburg,  
Dianne Nichol, Kurt Seeman, Bing Wang, Trevor Wilmshurst.

# Aims of this presentation

- To share the draft Framework more broadly across the Higher Education sector for feedback.
- To gauge the level of support for the statement amongst the broader academic profession and the wider community
- To provide further guidance for the working party on how to proceed in finalising the Framework.

# Common Issues Faced

- NCUP-UK
  - *Broaden membership*
  - *Role of professoriate*
- UA AAUP
  - *Broad membership*
  - *What does University leadership look like?*
  - *Casualisation weakening profession- unionisation*
- CA CAUP
  - *Academic freedom work with NTEU*
  - *Threats- casualisation, managerialism (codes of conduct), external interference (commercialization)*
- Structural issues
  - *NTEU & AAUP joint effort- (NTEU-ASWP??)*
- CAPA
  - *Need a voice independent of university management*
  - *Critical thinking*
- APU- coordinated action (NTEU?)
  - *University governance, silence of profession*
- AAUP- values, truth, principles, unite for effectiveness
- NTEU- EA as mechanism to protect AF
  - *AF at heart of University*
  - *Committee looking at AF*

*Is something fundamental missing from our response? Ethical Framework*

<https://onlyo.co/3HlhQBp>

# Why do we need a *Professional Ethical Framework for Australian Academics?*

- Broad statements on the importance of universities abound
  - e.g. *Magna Charta, Bologna Statement, AAUP “Ten Pillars”*
- But .... the university environment has changed....
  - *Growth of managerialism*
  - *Unprecedented emphasis on performativity and productivity*
  - *External accountability and internal compliance*
- For academics
  - *Loss of autonomy & decision-making power in universities*
  - *Challenge to academic freedom and our role in the advancement of knowledge for the benefit of society*
  - *Many colleagues have been acquiescent or complicit ...*
- Framework
  - *To provide guidance on and clarity about the academic role*

# Background to establishment of working Party

- October 20, 2020 the was idea for an ethical statement for academics was supported by AAUP Council.
- A survey was prepared and circulated to AAUP members (Nov-Dec 2020)
  - *31% response rate (202 responses from 655 members at the time)*
  - *At least one response from 36 universities*
  - *97% support for idea to better articulate the academic role and*
  - *80-90% agreement that it will be of benefit to academics and the sector as a whole.*
- Feb 2021, AAUP Council agrees to establishment of ethics working party

# Purpose of the Framework

This framework aims to:

1. Clearly outline the essential nature and values that underpin academic work.
2. Explain what is unique and valuable about academic work and why the role needs to be protected
3. Provide sound practical and ethical guidance to support our academic colleagues and university managers in their day-to-day decision-making.
4. Help academics to re-assert themselves as key stakeholders in the higher education sector
5. Provide an opportunity for our academic colleagues across the sector, and indeed across the world, to participate in a consultative process

# Timeline for development

- Members of Working party: John Kenny (Convenor), Michael Bird, Jill Blackmore, Robyn Brandenburg, Dianne Nichol, Kurt Seeman, Bing Wang, Trevor Wilmshurst.
- Timeline and process
  - *April-Sept 2021- Six meetings scheduled to develop draft statement*
  - *October 27, 2021- Presentation of first draft statement of Council for consideration*
  - *November-December re drafting of Framework*
  - *February 2-11, 2022, 2<sup>nd</sup> draft sent to members of AAUP Council for comment*
  - *February 17, 2022, 2<sup>nd</sup> draft presented to AAUP Annual Conference*
  - *During 2022, the working party to finalise and submit a paper outlining the scholarly underpinnings of the Framework.*

# Working party: Where do we start?

## 1. Who is our audience?

1. *Academic colleagues*
2. *University management*
3. *Government & other key stakeholder bodies*
4. *Broader community*

## 2. What is unique about academic work?

1. *What distinguishes academic work from other professional roles?*

## 3. Who owns the Framework?

1. *Developed and owned by AAUP on behalf of the Australian Academic Profession*

# Structure: of the Framework: Four Themes (Ferman, 2011)

Theme 1: Reconceptualising academic work in the modern university.

Theme 2: The professional nature of academic work.

Theme 3: The scholarly nature of academic work.

Theme 4: The workplace conditions necessary to support academics in their professional role.

# Theme 1: Reconceptualising academic work in the modern university.

- Impacts on academics due to performativity, external accountability, shifts in funding, massification, casualisation, ...
- Continued expectations of high-quality research and teaching
  - *Emphasis on applied research*
- Shift to managerial governance model
- Dominance of managerial values over academic values in decision-making
- Loss of autonomy and power in decision-making in institutions

# Theme 2: The professional nature of academic work.

## What does it mean to be a professional? (Freidson 1999)

- Higher purpose
  - *Service*
  - *Professional values: Altruistic, Intellectual integrity, Autonomy, Academic Humility & Collegiality*
- Specialised knowledge & skills
  - *Recognised qualifications*
  - *Keep up to date with developments in field*
- Trusted
  - *Autonomy in decision-making*

# Theme 3: The scholarly and interrelated nature of academic work.

## What is unique about academic work? How is it different to other professions?

- Requirement to be scholarly
  - *“develop and maintain a deep understanding of the current state of knowledge, practices and issues in their field(s) of expertise” (p.4)*
  - *Fearlessness and integrity in reporting findings*
- Research, Teaching and Service
  - *All aspects of the work are inter-related (Boyer, 1990)*
  - *Each aspect can contribute to the advancement of knowledge in a field*
- Service - to society, to profession, to discipline, to colleagues, to students and/or to institution.
- Academic leaders/manager have important role to play in protecting academic role
  - *Collaboratively design governance and policies to be inclusive & supportive*
  - *Clarify role of professors*
  - *Moderate impact of external demands on individual academics*

# Theme 4: The workplace conditions necessary to support the academic role.

## What have been the impacts of changes on academics and how do we address these?

- Drive for productivity through performativity means academic working conditions in universities have deteriorated.
  - *Large classes, compliance, online systems,*
  - *Long hours persist, but with loss of autonomy*
- Selective output-based measures, especially in research, devalue other scholarly aspects of the role
  - *Rise of the “rock-star” academic (Smyth, 2017)*

### Solution

- Need to design academic work and performance policies and processes to support the professional academic role and ensure equity.
  - *Principles (Kenny & Fluck, 2021)*
- Need academic leaders who understand and protect the role of academics.

# Specific questions/issues for follow-up

1. Once approved, should we require/urge/encourage all members of AAUP to affirm their commitment to this statement?
2. Does the AAUP constitution need a statement on ethics to be included?
3. Given this ethical statement applies to all academics, the AAUP may need to consider opening-up membership to Levels A, B & C academics (c.f .US-AAUP is open to all)?
  1. *Note the term “professoriate” in Australian Universities refers specifically to more senior academics (i.e., Professors and Associate Professors). The terminology differs in other countries. See a comparison with US & UK systems:*

[https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Reader\\_\(academic\\_rank\)#/Associate\\_professor\\_in\\_place\\_of\\_reader](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Reader_(academic_rank)#/Associate_professor_in_place_of_reader)

# Possible future actions

## *Further Consultation*

*March 2022- Presentation of ethical statement to broader community*

- NTEU, CAPA, PUA, UA, TEQSA, international bodies...*
- Working party to send scholarly paper for review*

## *Finalisation of the Framework*

- Working party develop final draft based on consultation*
- Approval by AAUP Council*
- Graphic design and circulation of final version via AAUP website*

## *Promotion*

- Article in conversation/THE...*
- Scholarly article*
- Encourage/recommend/require commitment to ethical statement for membership of AAUP?*
- Encourage all academics to commit to the ethical statement.*

# References

- Boyer, E.L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Ferman, T. (2011). *Academics' work and the concept of "profession": an Australian case study*. PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/50790/>
- Freidson, E. (1999) Theory of professionalism: Method and substance, *International Review of Sociology*, 9:1, 117-129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.1999.9971301>
- Kenny, J. & Fluck, A.E. (2021). Emerging principles for the allocation of academic work in universities. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00747-y>
- Smyth, J. (2017). *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, academic rock stars and neoliberal ideology*, Palgrave Critical University Studies, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-54968-6