

## **Discussion: Proposal to form council of professors**

Chair: Professor Ian Richards, UNISA

Speaker: Professor Alan Knight, UTS

Prof Knight proposed that Australian professors and associate professors of journalism form a council to develop ways to upgrade journals, cooperate on grants and consider how ethical issues relate to what professors do in their leadership roles. He said ethics and professional practice can help to define journalism as a practice and field of study.

This council would not supplant or duplicate the role of the JEA, which is a democratic body that represents educators across Australia. The council would operate separately from the JEA but could share findings at the JEA conference.

The introduction of ERA raises the need for a journal for professors of journalism. This would support a formal organisation that would be useful in terms of making representations on behalf of the discipline, and this is something bureaucratic organisations expect.

There is also a need for a group composed of just professors because they have specialised knowledge at the highest level and significantly different responsibilities from other academics that include:

- raising the quality and gradings of journals;
- promoting cooperation on the development and reception of ARC grants; and
- mentoring new career researchers and developing academics.

The council could also assume an active role in national debates about journalism.

Prof Knight then invited questions and comments from the conference delegates.

Prof Wendy Bacon commented that the discipline of journalism might have achieved better results during the ERA trial had there been an organised, senior academic voice representing journalism research. She said she supports the suggestion that the council operate technically independent of the JEA.

Other questions and comments, and answers from Prof Knight, were recorded as follows:

*Q: How would the council convene and discuss its objectives?*

A: We would set up the discussion group and conduct discussions electronically then evaluate that process after a year.

*Q: Some departments don't have a professor of journalism. Would there be a mechanism to include all institutions on this council?*

A: No. The purpose of the group is to enable professors to use their high level of expertise to represent the discipline. The qualification of professor is central.

One delegate commented that this is an important point of differentiation. The JEA represents educators, whereas the new council would provide advocacy and facilitation for journalism research – the area that needs it under the ERA model.

Prof Bacon said that in order to advance practice-based research, we need to find out what happened to the practice-based research outputs submitted during the trial, to see which ones were included and how they performed. She said other institutions might now move to create positions for professors or associate professors and that national meetings might be a way to include representatives from all institutions.

Another delegate commented that representation in previous years at JEA involved meetings for all heads of journalism, and that such meetings might be an alternative for institutions that don't have a professor to get together to discuss their issues.

There was general support for the formation of a professorial council to be one of the conference's outcomes and a motion was put forth by Peter Manning.

**Motion: This conference invites professors of journalism around Australia to form a professorial council to address issues raised at this conference with respect to journalism research and relations with the Australian Research Council.**

Moved: Peter Manning, Monash University and UTS

Seconded: Lawrie Zion, Latrobe University

Prof Knight asked the conference for a show of hands in response to the motion.

**There being a unanimous show of support, the motion was Carried.**

An informal discussion followed which led to the request that the first order of business for the professorial council would be to send a joint letter to the ARC objecting to the new ranking of the *Australian Journalism Review*.

It was also suggested that the professorial council might provide leadership in ethics practice and quality in research, given that practice-based journalism will assume higher importance within the ERA model.

Prof Knight agreed and noted that it is not well understood that journalists must adhere to the MEAA Code of Ethics, which may not satisfy the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council.

As the discussion drew to a close, Prof Knight said that professors and associate professors around Australia would be asked to form a council to address the issues raised at the conference, and would share their findings during the next JEA conference.