

Council of Australian Law Deans



The CALD Chair's report in the last ALTA newsletter focussed on the process we followed in responding to the ARC's request that the Deans contribute to "banding" law journals for the purposes of assessing the quality of legal research in Australia. This was a difficult and highly contentious exercise...made even more difficult by the very tight timelines that had been set by the ARC. In spite of those problems the CALD Executive was able, as a result of the hard work of its special ad hoc committee established to advise the Law Deans on this matter, to forward a provisional list of banded law journals for the ARC's consideration. The final list as now published by the ARC, although far from perfect, contains many of the changes suggested by CALD and is a much more appropriate reflection of how the academy currently ranks the standing of various foreign and Australian law reviews. Not surprisingly

however, the ARC's list has generated quite a deal of critical comment. While a good deal of the criticism has been directed at the very idea that the quality of published research is measurable by reference to proxies such as the title of the journal in which the research is published, some has been directed at the ranking accorded to particular law journals. CALD is well aware of the general methodological issues presented by approaches to quality assessments which utilise substitutes for actual peer review and has communicated these concerns to the ARC on numerous occasions. The fact remains, however, that the ERA panels are being invited to take proxies for quality into account in the forthcoming research audit. In these circumstances it is important that CALD and members of the legal academy generally should do what they can to ensure that at least the most glaring flaws in any such process are addressed and avoided.

On the teaching front, curriculum design and change are currently very high on the agenda of many law schools. It is pleasing to be able to report that the final draft of CALD's Discipline Based Initiative (DBI) project, funded by the ALTC and overseen by Professor Gary Davis and Dr Susanne Owen, has been completed and forwarded to the Council. We expect that document, entitled "Learning and Teaching in the Discipline of Law: Achieving and Sustaining Excellence in a Changed and Changing Environment", to be available electronically to all members of ALTA in the near future. In view of the importance and topicality of curriculum change, and in particular of the debate that now surrounds the teaching and proper place of ethics and statutory interpretation in the pre-admission law degree. I hope that all members will take the opportunity to read carefully that report when it appears. In my next column I intend to highlight some of the important issues it raises.

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Chair, Council of Australian Law Deans