



MEDIA RELEASE

Lessons for all universities in CCC's Murdoch report

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A Corruption and Crime Commission report presented to State Parliament today holds important lessons for the tertiary sector - a sector that is part of an international education industry worth an estimated \$20 billion nationally.

The report emphasises the role of a Vice-Chancellor in a university is pivotal and powerful; and a Senate must have a system of robust and continual governance.

The *Report on a Matter of Governance at Murdoch University* focusses on activities of former Vice-Chancellor Professor Richard Higgott. It illustrates what can occur when a Vice-Chancellor does not act with probity and a Senate fails to effectively articulate the parameters within which a Vice-Chancellor should act.

Professor Richard Higgott commenced as Vice-Chancellor of Murdoch University on 1 August 2011 and, within six months, the CCC received anonymous complaints about breaches of policy and conflicts of interest. Further complaints also followed.

After a period of assessment and liaison with Murdoch University, the Commission undertook a cooperative investigation with the University, which also engaged a number of consultants to examine specific aspects of the enquiry.

The cooperative investigation was protracted as it included the examination of hundreds of documents, a series of voluntary interviews and the private examination of three witnesses (one of whom was Professor Higgott), and periods of time during which related inquiries were being made by the University and its consultants.

A serious impediment to the investigation was the destruction of key documents. The CCC was not able to form an opinion on whether the document destruction was deliberate and designed to thwart an investigation, or not.

The Commission formed an opinion the manner in which Professor Higgott made the appointment of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) constituted serious misconduct. It involved a lack of integrity, transparency, an abuse of power and position, and his actions deceived the selection panel.

The Commission also formed opinions of misconduct in relation to Professor Higgott misleading both the Commission and the Chancellor in relation to the appointment

and termination of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professional Services); and in relation to Mr Higgott's downloading of adult material and subsequent attempts to delete it.

Full accounts of these activities are included in the Commission's report.

The decision to report to Parliament was made after discussions with the Chancellor and in-coming Vice-Chancellor of Murdoch University. The report provides other universities opportunities to examine their own governance, protocols and practices in light of the lessons emerging from the investigation.

The full report will be made available on the Commission's website at ccc.wa.gov.au.

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