

## *The Need for a National Mapping of Writing Courses in Tertiary Institutions*

The lack of formal links between writing programs around Australia prior to the establishment of the AAWP in 1996 is probably the main reason for there being no reliable national statistics relating to numbers of students and staff involved in the teaching of writing courses at tertiary level.

As [John O'Toole](#) suggests in an article published in this issue, figures produced by DEETYA in relation to the visual and performing arts (the recognised category most likely to apply to creative writing in the university context) don't appear to include writing studies at all and probably don't include all of theatre studies.

The organisations that have been most ready and able to respond to the vexed Research Quantum situation are associated with music and the visual arts - not surprisingly, because those areas have their distinct institutions in Colleges of Art and Conservatoria of Music in each state.

The May 1997 VCA symposium focussed on the perspectives of music, visual arts and dance. Without clear knowledge of the extent of writing and theatre courses - these being, as O'Toole points out, buried in a variety of departments (English, Creative Arts, Communications, etc.) - the symposium had difficulty representing and reporting back to writing and theatre teaching areas.

Due to the two AAWP conferences, and in the pages of *TEXT*, we are gradually forming an idea of the extent of writing courses around the country. Somewhat belatedly, the pressure is now upon us to quantify the contribution of writing courses to the overall teaching and research business of our universities.

The kind of information we need - to press the case for Research Quantum recognition of creative product as research - has its basis in statistics that give a clear picture of the extent to which university study (at all degree levels) concerns writing.

[Glen Phillips'](#) article, also published in this issue, reflects on the fact that most creative writing courses came under the aegis of the universities at the time of the Dawkins amalgamation process.

This is a factor which needs to be addressed. Not all university administrators and high-level academics were necessarily happy with the idea that practice-oriented teaching and research, inherited from the CAEs, should achieve equal status with the established 'research' disciplines.

We have always thought that if the universities now profess creative writing and other forms of writing, if they produce Bachelors, Masters and PhD level graduates in these areas and encourage an overall research culture, then the AVCC should also acknowledge that the task of working out research-equivalence for creative products is a matter of the highest priority.

O'Toole indicates that the commitment of Australian universities to the graduating of 'creative-trained' specialists represents over five percent of the total university industry. This is a significant proportion of the national tertiary education product. These graduates move into Arts industries which, in themselves, generate a significant proportion of the national economy.

The key initial factor required for the AAWP to join into the national debate over the Research Quantum and the significance of creative-oriented graduation and research in the universities is the collection of real data related to writing's participation in the university context.

The statistics able to be collected in this respect do not exist either for the university or TAFE sector. It is up to the AAWP to collect them. We therefore urge you to fill in the form provided under [The Mouse](#) heading in the contents page of this issue. Armed with real data, the AAWP can move forward in various national contexts to validate the significance of its existence.

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