

# Social Responsibilities of Universities

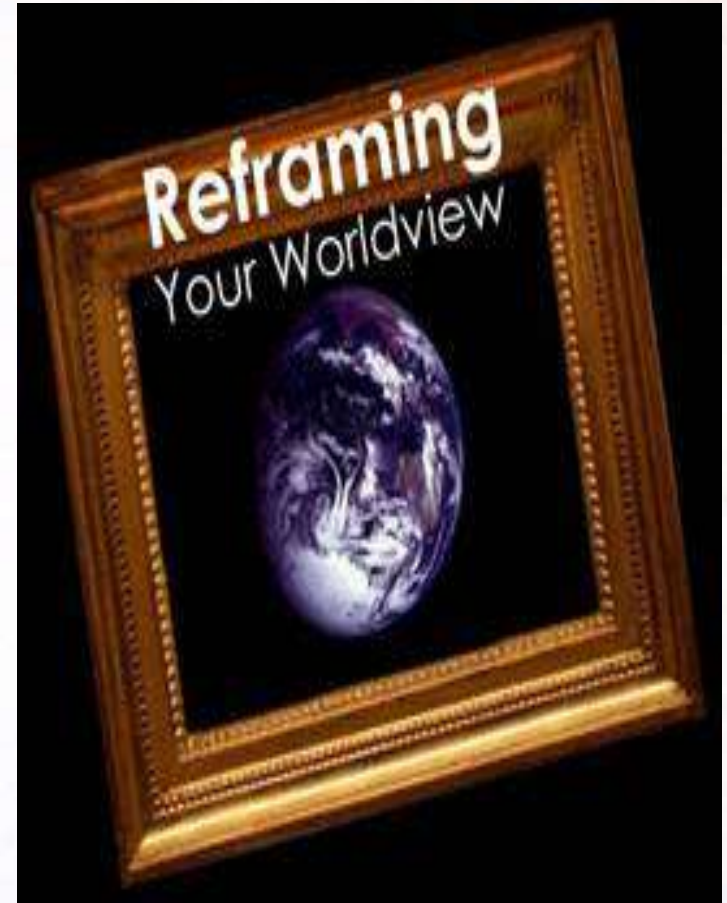


Daphne Mc Curdy  
Health & Safety Manager and PhD candidate  
University of New England (UNE)  
Armidale, Australia

[ohs@une.edu.au](mailto:ohs@une.edu.au)

# Overview

- Social responsibility definition
- Why change OHS framework?
- University context
- Rationale for change
- PhD research project
- Conclusion



# Aim and objective

## Aim

To challenge current framework for OHS management systems in Universities

## Objective

Explain why social responsibility is an appropriate model for reframing OHS in the university sector



# Guidance on Social Responsibility: ISO 26000

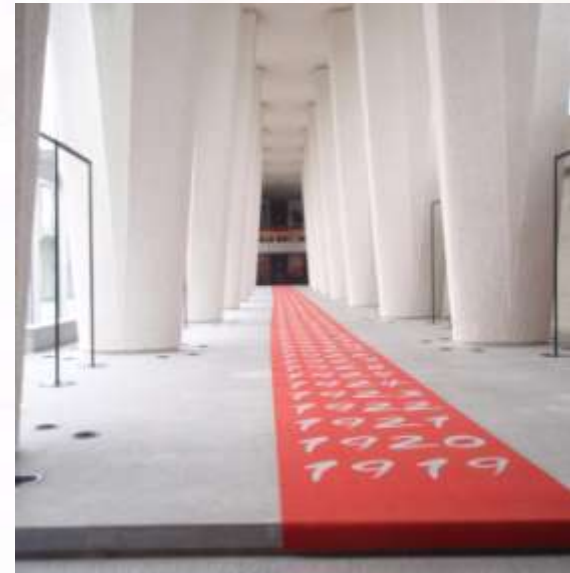
International Standards Organisation (ISO), (2010)

- Human rights
- Labour practices
- Governance
- Fair trading practices
- Community involvement and development
- Consumer issues
- The environment



# Seven principles of social responsibility (SR)

1. Accountability
2. Transparency
3. Ethical behaviour
4. Respect for rule of law
5. Respect for human rights
6. Respect for stakeholder interests
7. Respect for international norms of behaviour



# Definition: social responsibility (SR)

## ISO 26000; 2.1.18

Responsibility of an organization (2.1.12) for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment (2.1.5) through transparent and ethical behaviour (2.1.23) that

- contributes to sustainable development (2.1.23) including health & the welfare of society
- takes into account the expectations of stakeholders(2.1.20)
- is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour (2.1.10) and
- is integrated throughout the organization(2.1.12)and practiced in its relationships.
  - Note 1 Activities include products, services and processes
  - Note 2 relationships refer to an a organizations activities within its sphere of influence (2.1.19)

# Working definition: social responsibility

Voluntary integration of social, ethical, sustainability and human rights principles in making decisions that affect safety and well-being of present and future generations



# Traditional OHS framework

- Regulatory & compliance
- Workers only
- Physical hazards
- Chemical hazards
- Bio-hazards
- Manual handling
- Technical risk assessment
- Some environmental risks
- Fragmentation in university sector:
  - academic, building, security, performance, compliance



# Recent OHS initiatives

- AS/NZS4801 – AS/NZS4804
- Post-graduate courses
- Well-being and work health
- SIA activity:
  - Body of knowledge
  - Operational and strategic
- Safe Work & Vic govt:
  - MAPS; drivers and motivators
  - Adelaide; curriculum
- Harmonisation



# Model Act opportunities: primary duty of care

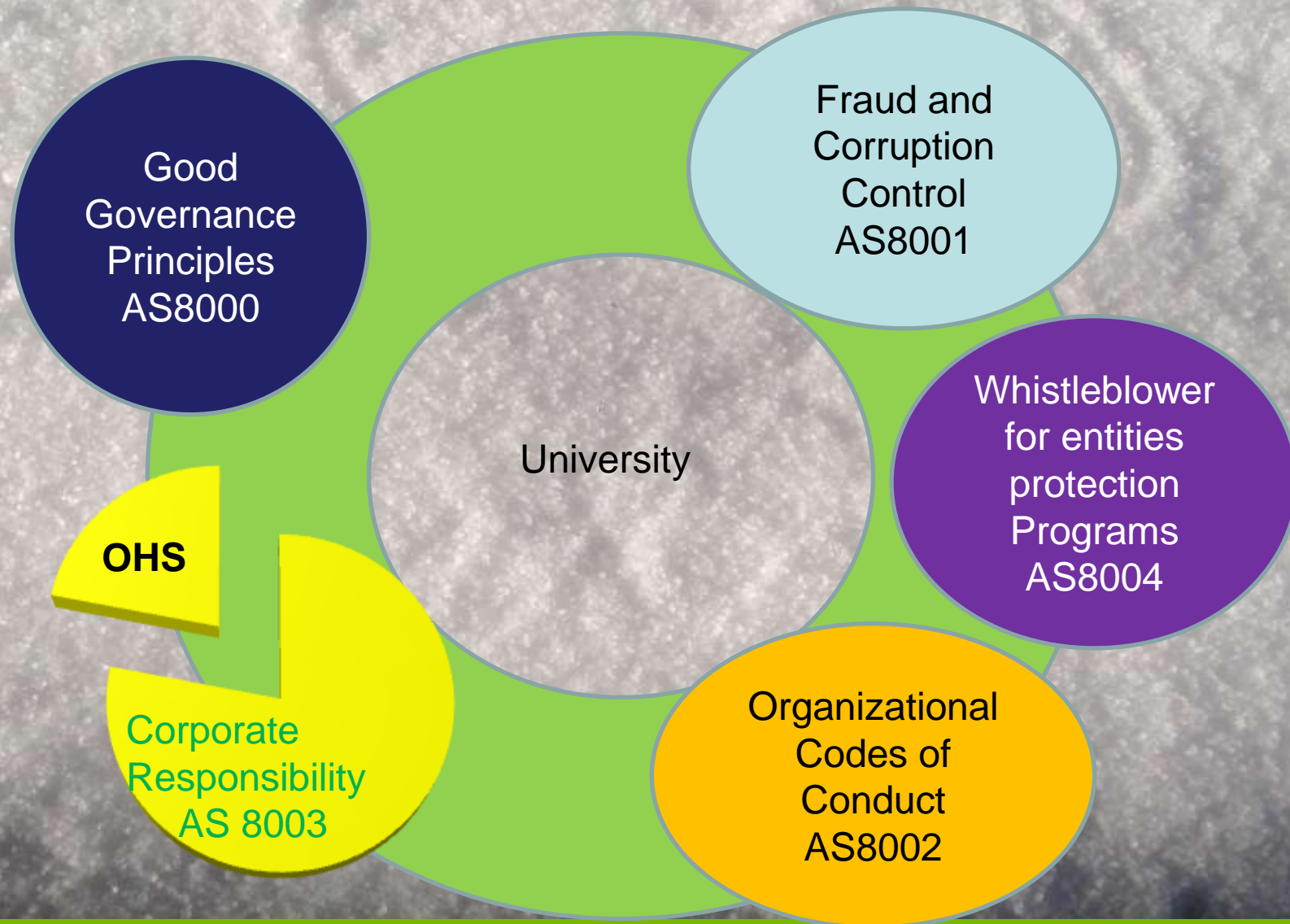
## s18 (f)

- Provide any information, training, instruction or supervision necessary to protect all persons from risks to their health and safety arising from work carried out as part of the conduct of the business or undertaking

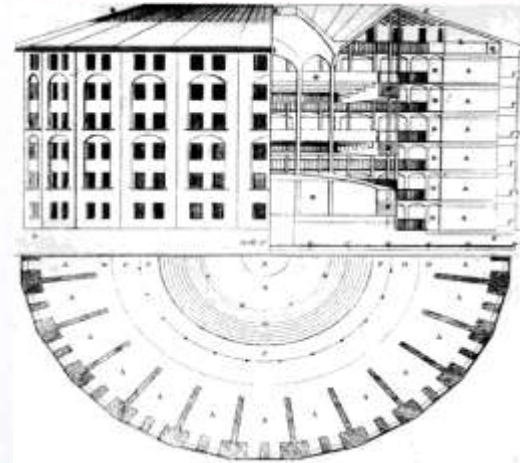
## s26

...an officer of that body must exercise due diligence to ensure that the body complies with that duty

# AS 8000–8004 Governance Standards



# University OHS organisational structures vary



# University changes since World War 2

1945

1960's

1980's

2012

- Mass education
- Diverse student population
- Quality and accountability
- Life long learning
- Knowledge society
- Professional management
- Public funding 1.5% GDP
- 100,000 staff, 1 million students
- Economic recovery solution
- Talloires (2006) sustainability



# Universities Australia's expectations

Australia's (39) universities prepare people:

- for highly skilled jobs of tomorrow
- to be leaders in developing and adapting new knowledge
- to revitalise economy
- strengthen society and tackle problems



# Graduates – management professionals: are graduates being adequately prepared?

- Underlying causes of fatal accidents are often found in **design, leadership and planning**
- Consideration should be given to these in university courses



# Health and well-being

- Education sector has 6% of Australian mental stress claims
- Bullying an identified concern
- Serious growing problem affecting job satisfaction, moral and mental health of university staff
- High suicide rate for young doctors and other graduates
- Student under reporting of incidents
- Student concerns including drugs and alcohol, security, accommodation, sexual assault



# Views on individual/collective SR may vary

- Values and ethics?
- Politics and education?
- Culture and religion?
- Family and Community?
- Subjective or objective?
- Emotive issues?
- Investment choices?



*“Every man.....is much more deeply interested in whatever immediately concerns himself. Than in what concerns any other man”*

*Adam Smith*

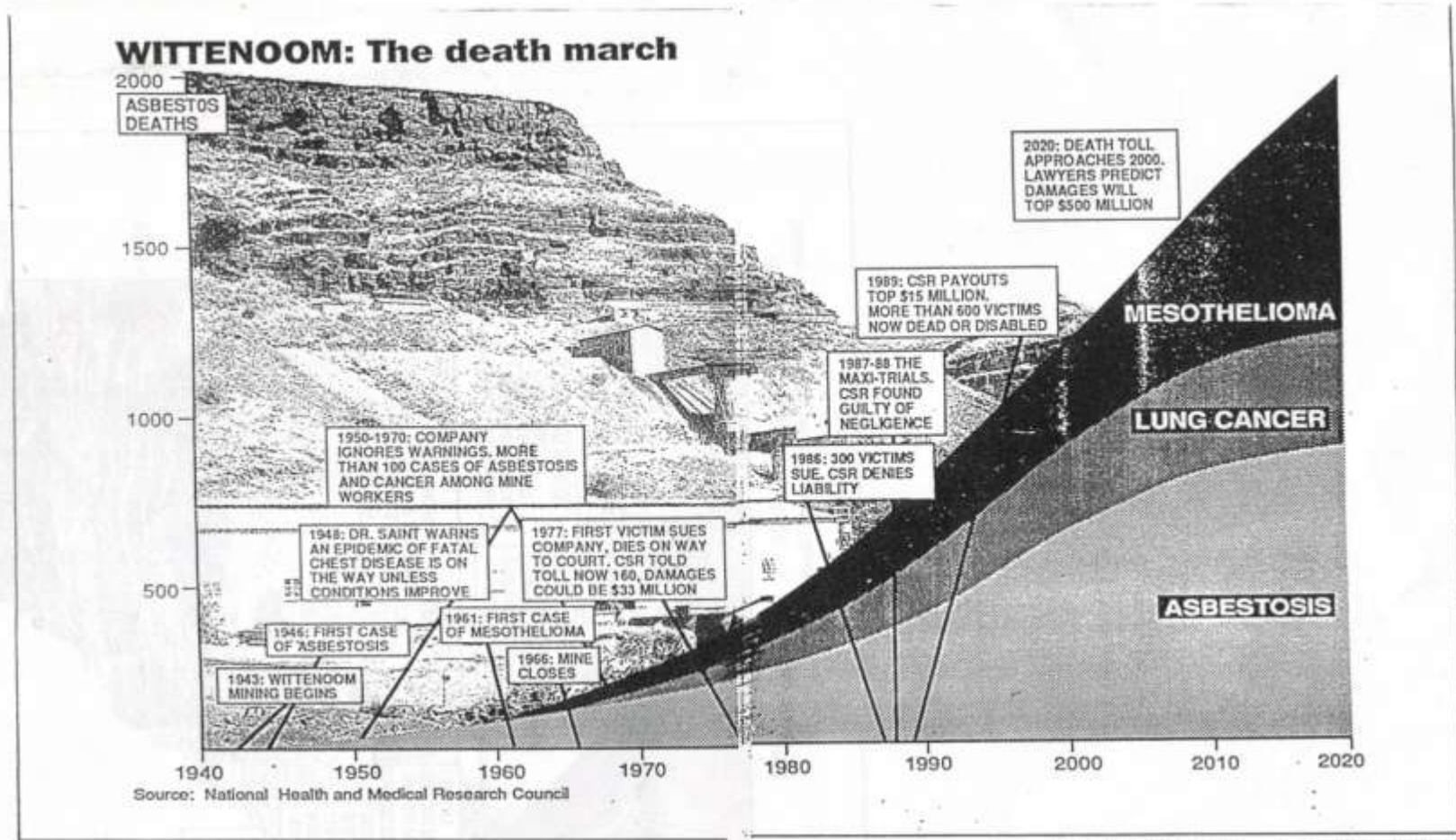
# Risk management is complex

- Social construct
- OHS has expertise in prescribed technical risk
- Scientific risk assessment often ignores social reality
- Influence of cultural and socio economic factors
- External factors important
- Disadvantaged often lack empowerment to control risk



# Researchers response to high-risk asbestos

Is there a disconnect between research activity and research/OHS in action?



Source: Blue Murder Ben Hills 1989.

# Knowledge

What roles do universities have in providing safety specific theory and role models?

- 40% of incoming university students have no safety training
- Transdisciplinary knowledge—history, heritage, psychology, international studies
- People are product, central to sustainability



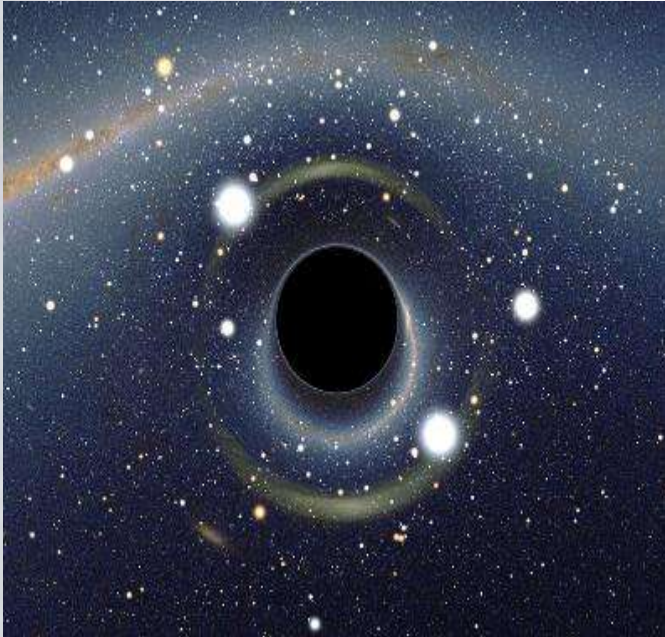
# Competing pressures for staff

Are principles and ethics guidelines being provided?

- Conservative and radical
- Critical and supportive
- Competitive and collegial
- Autonomous and accountable
- Private and public
- Excellent and equal
- Entrepreneurial and caring
- Certain and provisional
- Traditional and innovative
- Ceremonial and iconoclastic
- Local and international
- People valuable resource v budgets, tenure, staff cuts



# Australian universities and social responsibility



## Web search:

- Social responsibility in mining
- Heritage of caring for others
- Commitment to social justice
- Steven Schwartz; social values
- Graduate attributes
- Equity
- Disadvantaged students

# UNESCO – Social responsibility of universities

- Personal intellectual advancement
- + Broader goals
- Public good
- Produce leaders of tomorrow
- Release potential of everyone<sup>AS/NZS</sup>
- Equip graduates with ethical and entrepreneurial skills
- Innovate – oversee development of new technologies
- Think tanks – use abstract to quantify and evaluate
- Foresee and alert to trends – prevent major crisis
- Set path to peace and sustainable development
- Engage with the community to create just society

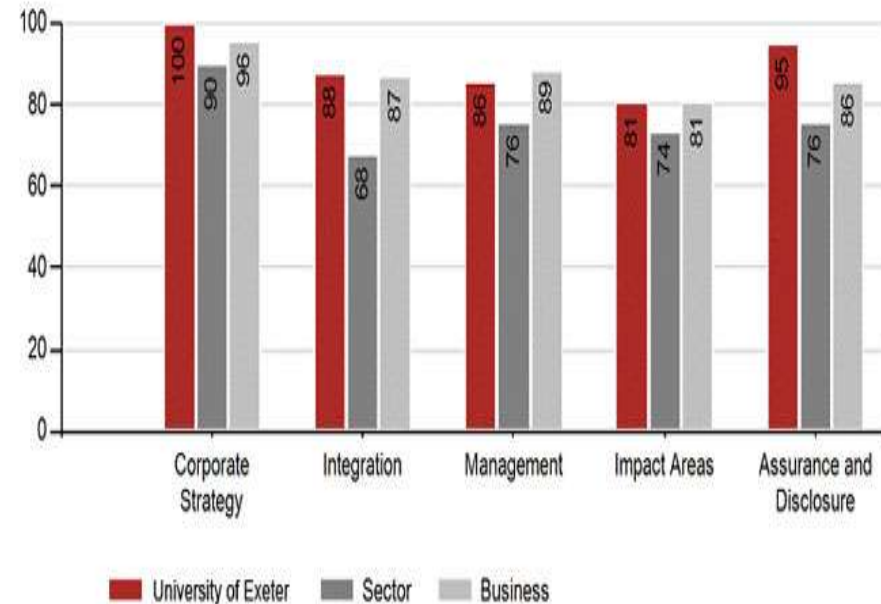


United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Universities that count

## Environment and social responsibility index

- Based on Business in the community (BITC) index
- On-line questionnaire
- Used a benchmarking and management tool
- 53 UK universities
- Four pillars:
  - Community
  - Environment
  - Marketplace
  - Workplace



# Matter of life and death

*Safety is not an intellectual exercise to keep us in work. It is a matter of life and death....and on Piper they died.*

ICI management  
Piper Alpha 1988  
167 fatalities



Coroner inquiry - Jarrod Stehbens 2005



# PhD research project: Social responsibilities of universities: perceptions and drivers of SR/OHS culture and performance

## Questions

1. What do universities do to enact their social responsibilities for staff, students and community health & safety ?
2. How can universities improve their performance in this?
3. What are impediments to university sector focus on of OHS as a priority?

## Activities to include

- Snapshot web search
- Identify perceptions of OHS professionals, senior management and academics
- Create and trial OHS/SR index



# Conclusion

- OHS current framework
- Social responsibility model
  - Management professionals – specialist graduates
  - Health and well-being – staff and student
  - Individual v collective – risk management
  - Researcher responses – community – knowledge
- Change is a challenge
- Opportunity for leadership







