




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (12.17 pm): As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for education, I rise to address the Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021. This bill was introduced into the Queensland parliament by the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing, Hon. Grace Grace MP, on 1 September 2021. On 15 October 2021 the Queensland parliament's Education, Employment and Training Committee tabled its report into the Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021. The committee made two recommendations. The committee recommended, firstly, that the Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021 be passed with amendment; and, secondly, 'that the minister amends the bill to clarify that an elected academic staff member or an elected professional staff member of the QUT Council who ceases to be a member under new sections 77 and 78 of the bill continues to be eligible to fill a casual vacancy under section 20A of the Queensland University of Technology Act 1998, during the current QUT Council term'.

I acknowledge that it was a unanimous recommendation of the committee that the bill be passed, noting the advice of the Department of Education, which supported such a clarifying statement. The Liberal National Party will not be opposing this legislation. I acknowledge the bipartisanship of the parliamentary committee with respect to its recommendation, the minister's earlier contribution in relation to the government's response and those amendments which have been foreshadowed and which will be moved in consideration in detail.

In turning to the specifics of the proposed legislation, the primary objective of the bill is to implement governance reforms within the Queensland University of Technology and to enable an appropriate balance between the number of QUT Council members and the necessary skills mix and expertise that is required for effective governance of the Queensland University of Technology Council. It should be noted that the Queensland University of Technology is a statutory body established under the Queensland University of Technology Act 1998. The QUT Act establishes the council as QUT's governing body and gives the council overall responsibility to ensure sound and effective governance of QUT. The Queensland University of Technology Act confers powers on the council, including to, firstly, appoint QUT staff; secondly, manage and control QUT's affairs and property; and, thirdly, manage and control QUT's finances.

The Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021 proposes to reduce the size of the QUT Council from 22 to 15 members, with the composition of the council to be as follows: three official members—the chancellor, the vice-chancellor and the chairperson of the academic committee, and this composition remains the same; three members appointed by the Governor in Council, and this has been reduced from eight members to three; five elected members, which is reduced from nine, comprising of two members of the academic staff, one member of the professional staff, one undergraduate student and one postgraduate student; and, finally, four additional members, which is increased from two, with at least two of these four members having to be an alumni of the Queensland University of Technology.

As the minister outlined, this streamlining of those governance processes and that reduction to 15—having also served on many professional and corporate boards myself including the Australian Medical Association of Queensland and the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland and other entities—will enhance the functions and the operations with respect to the number of people who will be on the QUT Council. As per the legislation's explanatory notes, the changes to the membership, as I have just outlined, will increase efficiency whilst also providing for an appropriate mix of skills and experience for the purposes of effective governance. It is important to note that the reduction in the number of council members is in accordance with best governance practice and that these changes are also in line with Universities Australia's voluntary code of best practice for the governance of Australian universities.

Following the introduction of the Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021, the Minister for Education nominated the Education, Employment and Training Committee to further examine and consider the bill and on 3 September this committee invited stakeholders and submitters to make written submissions on the bill, with those submissions closing on 21 September. Three submissions were received by the committee. In addition to the written submissions, the committee received a public briefing about the legislation from the Department of Education on 13 September, with a public hearing and further public briefing held on 30 September 2021.

In relation to the three written submissions received, two of these submissions were in support of the bill and one was against the proposed legislation. The Vice-Chancellor and President of QUT, Professor Margaret Sheil AO, and Ms Leanne Harvey, Vice-President (Administration) and Registrar of QUT, provided a submission in support of the legislation, as did Griffith University's Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Carolyn Evans. Both of these submissions stated that the proposed model brings the Queensland University of Technology into alignment with other modern university councils and allows for more efficient and effective governance. In contrast, the National Tertiary Education Union provided a submission which rejected the proposed bill, with the main concerns being that the proposed legislation in its view favoured the preferences of QUT management and that the proposals did not have broad community support, with the legislation also diminishing transparency and accountability.

I would like to note some points of difference and concerns which were raised in relation to the consultation process. As per the Queensland University of Technology's own consultation process, the first consultation round took place between June and August 2019, with the second round of consultation occurring between August and October 2020 and a third consultation round taking place in July 2021. Concerns were raised that the number of responses appeared to be low, with only 11 written responses from the nearly 65,000 emails which were distributed by QUT seeking feedback. On this point, the National Tertiary Education Union noted in its submission the low response rate and suggested that, with no changes being made to the bill based on the responses received, the bill was, in essence, representing the preferences and views of QUT management and not the broader community. Whilst I note that the Department of Education offered a response to the concerns raised by the National Tertiary Education Union through the committee's examination of the legislation, as we heard before from the minister a detailed response has been tabled by the government in relation to those concerns which were raised.

I also take this opportunity, as the minister has done, to acknowledge the work of QUT, because it is one of Queensland's and Australia's most esteemed universities with approximately 50,000 registered students. Work has occurred between QUT and many of our secondary schools in relation to fostering combined vocational education and training and to assist with students as they transition from high school education into the tertiary sector. In my own electorate of Moggill, students from Kenmore State High School attend QUT to undertake a number of different courses. Importantly as well with QUT, it has many distinguished researchers who are contributing vital work not only here in Queensland but across Australia.

Recently I had the opportunity to meet with the Queensland University of Technology's distinguished professor Lidia Morawska, who has been named on the TIME100 annual list as one of the most influential people in the world. In the innovation category she was recognised alongside other visionaries and world leaders including Elon Musk. She was recognised for her groundbreaking research in relation to air quality as a means of preventing the airborne transmission of COVID-19 and other similar airborne viruses. I know that she has been in discussions with various state jurisdictions about some of those matters and also the work that is being progressed by the government here in Queensland. As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for education, I want to acknowledge her work as a researcher at QUT.

The other group that I want to quickly recognise in relation to QUT is the Australian Centre for Health Services Innovation, which is also achieving world-leading translational research to improve the quality and value of healthcare service delivery. In fact, on 3 November this year the Australian Centre

for Health Services Innovation celebrated its 10-year anniversary. It began as a partnership between Queensland Health, the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, QUT as well as the University of Queensland. Its work has significantly grown over the years. It is certainly an important research centre based within QUT's Faculty of Health. By celebrating that milestone and working on various research projects and partnerships with various health services, it is delivering positive and significant impacts in the way in which health services are delivered. I want to offer my congratulations to that centre and acknowledge Professor Steven McPhail, the Academic Director, at AusHSI as well as all staff who contribute to various programs and research and also the internationally renowned health economist and founding academic director of AusHSI, Adjunct Professor Nicholas Graves.

In returning to the bill, in Queensland we are very fortunate to have many higher education institutions. Again echoing the words of the minister, it has been an incredibly tough time for our higher education institutions given what we have had to deal with in terms of COVID-19 and border closures, as many students have not been able to come here to study various courses. That has certainly had an impact on all universities, including QUT. As we continue to recover from the pandemic, it is important that higher education remains available to all Australians and that both the federal and state governments continue to work cooperatively to rebuild the sector and provide the necessary supports to ensure that those students return to Australia at the most appropriate and available opportunity when it is safe to do so. There are now more than 800,000 students studying at Australian universities compared to over 763,000 the year before. There has been an increase, but more needs to be done given the disruptions that have taken place.

With those words, as I have said before, the Liberal National Party will not be opposing the bill. We acknowledge the work of the committee. I would like to thank all members of the Education, Employment and Training Committee of the 57th Parliament, including the deputy chair, the member for Southern Downs, as well as the member for Theodore, for their examination of the bill and the committee staff and the committee secretariat for their assistance. The work that our committees do is extremely important in scrutinising legislation and certainly in this case coming to a conclusion in a spirit of bipartisanship of how important this process will be in streamlining the QUT Council, reducing its members from 22 to 15 and what that will mean for enhancing and strengthening the governance of the university while also being in line with best practice.