




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (12.36 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021. I thank my honourable friend, the member for Redlands, for her observations about the committee. I wholeheartedly endorse them. We are a happy committee. We get on well. I would like to thank her for the fairness with which she chairs our meetings. I would also like to say how important it is that we have good committee staff. We have excellent committee staff. They put their shoulder to the wheel every day. Nothing is ever too much trouble for them. In particular I would like to thank Rob, Rhyll and Carolyn for the work they do to support us. We are travelling to North Queensland on another bill which has created a lot of extra work for them along with the normal pattern of activity that the committee undertakes. I thank them very much. I thank the members for Redlands, Rockhampton, Stafford, Hinchinbrook and Theodore for their work on this particular bill.

Fundamentally this bill is about efficiency. It is about two broad themes: reducing the size of the QUT Council from 22 to 15 members with an eye to best practice in terms of governance and skills and getting the right balance to achieve that. As was mentioned by the minister, we will see a reduction in the size of the QUT Council, which was recommended by the university itself, from 22 to 15. The official members remain the same. The previously eight appointed members will be reduced to three, the previous nine elected members will be reduced to five and there will be four additional members, two of whom must be members of the QUT alumni.

It is noteworthy that the university has asked for these changes in order to be compliant with what the university sector sees as best practice in terms of its management. The Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Public Universities was mentioned. The themes that are addressed in the code to ensure universities are as agile and adaptive and efficient as they can be are strategic oversight, overall management of the university on a day-to-day basis and responsible financial and risk management. That last theme is no small thing, because universities, like all organisations, have to manage the risks that they face, be it the risk of loss of assets or loss of income from various changes. The minister mentioned the COVID pandemic and how that has been particularly hard on universities. Any organisation that wants to deal with curve balls like that needs to be focused and lean so I can understand the reasoning behind the reduction in the size of the QUT Council.

I should disclose to the House that I am a graduate of the Queensland University of Technology. I certainly enjoyed my time there doing a Bachelor of Applied Science. I remember mischievously choosing my subjects in such a way that it would maximise my opportunity to come here, sit in the gallery and watch the goings-on on the floor of this House in the nineties.

Mr Nicholls interjected.

Mr LISTER: I thought that the member for Clayfield might have been a political tragic himself, but obviously I eclipse him in that regard.

Mr Nicholls interjected.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection; yes. The QUT is a fine university. Like many universities it has been hit very hard by the COVID pandemic. In Australia our university sector depends very heavily on foreign enrolments. That has been one of the greatest success stories in terms of exports for our nation. It has also served to expose Australia to our region. I am sure those who study here return to their homes with positive feelings about Australia and will be ambassadors for us in their countries, which is great for our region.

I see great potential for QUT in the research space because we have a booming defence industry in our country. The federal government is increasing spending on the acquisition of defence capability in the order of hundreds of billions of dollars. Universities such as the Queensland University of Technology will be essential in collaborating with industry and government to do the research necessary for us to have the technology and sovereign defence capability, such as missiles and information warfare capabilities, that we will need. In order to capitalise on those things, universities such as QUT need to be lean, agile and focussed on that business.

As the minister said, the current council composition of 22 members does seem a bit unwieldy. Her comparison with the cabinet of Queensland was a worthy one because obviously there is a very onerous responsibility upon those 18 members. With the reduction in the numbers here I cannot see that there will be any relative changes in the representation of the various classes of members so I do not share the concerns expressed by the National Tertiary Education Union. The university will manage fine and the various interest groups within the university will continue to be represented. I have every faith that the Queensland University of Technology will continue on to great things.

However, in this particular regard it was fascinating for me as a conservative politician to sit in the public hearing and listen to the contribution of the National Tertiary Education Union. To be sure, they laid into our side of politics. They made plain their views about the management and current state of the university sector. That is not unexpected when a union is talking about a conservative federal government. However, it was interesting that the union also laid into the current government. I believe they did so in the sincere belief that they were standing up for their members who work at the Queensland University of Technology. They said—

In the midst of this crisis we are now dealing with an ALP state government that is set on continuing the work of the Newman government in undermining industrial democracy. Industrial democracy is the concept that workers who work somewhere have a knowledge of, a direct interest in and a right to contribute to the direction of their employer.

In isolation that is quite a noble aspiration. It amused me a bit because it seems that you cannot choose your family.

With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will give a plug to the University of Southern Queensland. Shortly I will be meeting with the vice-chancellor and the Minister for Training and Skills Development, and I thank the minister very much for that opportunity. I thank the government and the University of Southern Queensland for their investment in the Queensland College of Wine Tourism in my electorate. It is a very important facility. It has a great future. It is important that we have an entity such as that to train tomorrow's winemakers, to train people to provide the first-class hospitality that we have in Southern Downs and to train people to do the research that is necessary to make sure that our wine industry continues to progress and is able to deal with difficulties in terms of pests and diseases and also emerging trends in the wine market. I thank the government for that and I acknowledge Professor Geraldine Mackenzie, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southern Queensland, for the university's partnership with the state government in providing that facility. The amount of money involved is not small. I will always be thankful when governments provide for that particular facility in my electorate. Thank you very much for your forbearance, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): It is an issue close to my heart, member for Southern Downs.