




Speech By
Joseph Kelly

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.02 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021. I would like to start by acknowledging and thanking the minister for her good work on this bill. I would like to thank the committee and all of the submitters for the work they have done in relation to this bill.

At the core of this bill is the improvement of governance for universities. Anybody who has done the AICD company directors course, been on a management committee or been a director knows that good governance is a key to success and that getting governance right will mean that your organisation is ultimately very successful. Its importance was probably highlighted during the Financial Services Royal Commission. The commission identified governance issues as the key causes for many of the problems that were occurring in that sector. Average people in the street losing their money, dead people being charged fees and all of the other terrible things we saw happening started with a lack of attention to governance. That is what this bill is really about.

This bill is about trying to ensure that universities, particularly QUT but all universities, have good governance. They are incredibly complex organisations—organisations at their core around research and teaching. It is phenomenal how many different activities the modern university is involved with. In fact, tomorrow morning the partnership of the three great universities in our city will be here talking about future energy. That demonstrates the expanse and the reach of universities. Without good governance, those complex institutions would find themselves flapping around in the breeze and unable to achieve their missions. I put on record that I am in the process of applying for a higher degree by research at QUT, but it does not create a conflict of interest on this bill so I will continue with my contribution.

The electorate of Greenslopes is blessed with close proximity to QUT and UQ, and in fact we are the gateway to Griffith. Many people choose to make the electorate of Greenslopes their home, whether they are working or studying at those institutions. Of course, the great public transport that is available, which is only going to get better with Cross River Rail, and the improvements we are seeing on the veloway only make those universities closer and more accessible.

What this bill demonstrates, in my opinion, is the commitment of the Palaszczuk Labor government to the tertiary education sector. It is a commitment that was once again demonstrated last year, when the Palaszczuk Labor government picked up the slack in terms of supporting the tertiary education sector. Like many other people, they were smashed by the pandemic and the impacts of border closures and abandoned by the federal government. We estimated that there were approximately 45,000 jobs lost across the sector. As I was standing on doorsteps or at bus stops or attending community events, because of the many people who choose to live in the electorate of Greenslopes and work at those institutions I met many people who had been affected in that way. They were very appreciative of the support given by the Palaszczuk Labor government. Even though it is not the responsibility of our level of government, we are going to be there to support all Queenslanders.

It is exactly these sorts of challenges—the job losses—that require the sort of good governance that this bill will deliver. As I said, I met so many people who were appreciative of the support of the Palaszczuk government—I note the minister nodding her head—but they were confused as to why, on three separate occasions, universities were specifically excluded from JobKeeper payments. I know that they were really unhappy that those opposite sat silently by while this happened.

COVID has absolutely decimated international education, and QUT will need really strong governance to navigate its way out of this situation. I have seen estimates—I believe they are reasonably accurate—that the total contribution of international education to the Australian economy is somewhere in the vicinity of \$48 billion. It is absolutely massive. We have arrived there because over 30 years or more federal governments of all persuasions have encouraged international education, not just as a source of revenue. We get so much more out of having international students come here and sending our young people overseas. The reality is that it is a major contributor to our economy.

Over 2020 and 2021, universities directly lost nearly \$4 billion. The Morrison government's response to that loss of \$4 billion over the last two years was to put up a package of around \$53 million. This only adds to the insult of the \$3.5 billion that has been stripped from the sector since the LNP was elected federally. When you are facing these sorts of challenges—massive losses in revenue as well as your funding body stripping funds away from you—you need really strong governance practices to move forward.

Our state has felt the significant benefits of international education and we are now feeling the pain. As you drive out of my electorate and you go through the roundabout at O'Keefe Street, you will pass student accommodation—quite significant towers. In 2019 the lights were all on. It is really sad to drive by now and see one entire building and about 50 per cent of the other building in darkness. If you want to see an image of the impact of the loss of international students, there it is right in front of your eyes. That has knock-on effects to the businesses in Stones Corner and Coorparoo and further afield, in Buranda and those sorts of areas. It is making it hard for those local employers to find employees as well, because the international students were such a significant contributor when it came to jobs in many industries.

To reverse and get back from that, we need strong and strategic leadership in universities that is only available as a result of the good governance that this bill provides. Anyone involved in this sector knows that universities have invested heavily in attracting students, supporting them while studying and helping them to move back into the workforce. It is no accident that we have international students in such numbers providing such a contribution. Universities have invested heavily in this area.

Sadly, part of those \$3.5 billion worth of cuts that the federal LNP implemented was cutting the Office of Teaching and Learning. This office was driving strategic improvements in teaching quality and ensured that we were competitive on a global field. It is not just enough to have the borders open; students have to want to come here and see the benefit of coming here, and we were able to deliver that. Clearly good governance is absolutely crucial in getting international students back here but, sadly, the federal LNP does not care about this sector and its counterparts here continue to be silent, saying nothing. It is very important that we have really strong local institutions like the Queensland University of Technology having the best possible governance and strategic leadership. That is why I support this bill and would encourage all members to do the same.