




Speech By  
**Linus Power**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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### **QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (4.55 pm): I rise to speak on the Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill. We in this place must recognise how important our universities are as part of our economy but also our society. I represent an area of the state that does not have the highest rate of university education, but Logan residents absolutely know that higher education is a vital part of the economy of our state. They recognise that universities such as QUT are vital for a vibrant, diverse economy—as vital as tradies and other workers.

Unlike those opposite, we back all workers. We do not attack our QUT educated teachers or our QUT educated nurses. We know that those opposite play games, sacking nurses and teachers, and we all saw how the federal member for Bowman attempted to undermine our teachers. When it comes to our universities, he is joined by the rest of the LNP members, both here and in Canberra, attacking our university sector. They constantly make out our world-class universities and our world-class research to be something to be undermined and attacked. They want to undermine the jewels of our economy by attempting to play pathetic American-style culture wars. In Queensland and in Logan in particular people value and respect the university sector and recognise that universities such as QUT are focused on the jobs of the future and see a practical, everyday benefit of that research and those ideas.

During COVID we saw extreme strain on this sector, but we know how much benefit it brings. This sector brings research to create vaccines for our community. We know that universities train our nurses and doctors and provide that vital care. That is why this bill to restructure the board of QUT is so vital. We all know the value of universities such as QUT, but we should recognise that this period has been very tough for our universities. Prior to COVID-19, because of the world renown of our universities and the great lifestyle and the welcoming community that Queensland has, many students travelled from overseas to study for degrees at QUT. These students' families often made significant sacrifices to send their precious children into our care to receive a world-class education. I met QUT students from overseas who simply loved their experience in Australia.

If we were to measure this with other exports—in this case we are exporting knowledge, an infinitely renewable resource—it would be our fourth largest export industry which creates over 200,000 jobs. However, we also know that during COVID-19 the ability for students to travel to and from Australia was—rightfully—constrained. Many students had to travel home to deal with family issues and were under considerable financial pressure. The member for Mount Ommaney spoke movingly of a local church group that supported students through soup kitchens. COVID has put pressure on universities like QUT and the incoming board will have to continue to deal with this real challenge. If this had happened to any other export industry, then there would have been huge support from the federal government to maintain our readiness to restore exports and to increase vaccination rates.

The sector, including QUT, has suffered considerable job losses and even more pressure from casualisation. I know having worked in the sector how hard it is, but the work is vital and rewarding in the field of education. However, many faced uncertainty and casualised hours and then during COVID they were told that they could lose their job and at the same time the university would lose their skills,

their commitment and their knowledge. One such worker was taken in with another worker in a similar sector and told that one of them had to go and that if no-one volunteered they would have to toss a coin to see who lost their job.

Investment in universities during COVID from the federal government could have prevented these job losses, but instead the federal government explicitly excluded universities, including QUT, from the JobKeeper system. Bizarrely, New York University Sydney was awarded \$16.5 million in JobKeeper. Private universities such as Bond and other universities also received JobKeeper payments. I do not mention them to put them down, but to point out the different standards that were applied. This led to more than 40,000 job losses, some of them in regional areas. Not that the federal LNP members ever spoke up in those areas. These are the challenges the board will face going forward and the economic circumstances that this new and invigorated board will have.

We have to be ready to use this board to restore universities such as QUT. The federal government, increasing student fees as it has done, should back our universities and help restore overseas students. I have probably emphasised too much the economic value of overseas students, but we should also remember the social and cultural value that they bring. The old Liberal Party used to understand this. Prime Minister Menzies backed such plans as the Colombo Plan, used to share and exchange knowledge with the Asia Pacific region, but this LNP sees it as fodder to attack in a bizarre culture war. Logan people know they bring a positive impact. They also know that their presence makes for a richer educational experience on our university campuses.

The new board will continue to have two students and two alumni students, increasing that as a proportion. It should be recognised that a great education is a vital end product of these institutions. I should note for the chamber that I am a former member of the National Tertiary Education Union from when I worked at universities. I note that the NTEU had concerns about the continuing role of staff members who are not in management of the university. These general concerns should be noted. We should have great careers at a university: strong, stable jobs for both academic and professional staff. I note the National Tertiary Education Union's long commitment to the university sector and the value of strong, stable jobs. Noting my previous concerns, I share their concern over casualised work.

University lecturers love teaching and love doing world-leading research. Members would be surprised in some cases at the low pay they receive. They might be superstars when they have shown their research internationally over Zoom conferences in the last year, but they are deeply undervalued. I do not blame the board of QUT or, indeed, any of the universities that are struggling because they have an equal passion for our university sector, but I do see the budget cuts that make this a struggle for any board and remind those on the incoming board that they have to work with the National Tertiary Education Union to improve the value and role of those who do such great work at our universities.

I am disappointed that the member for South Brisbane spent so much time attacking Labor but so little time examining the cuts of the federal LNP government of Scott Morrison that have hurt the sector so much. We know the member for South Brisbane is dependent on LNP preferences. Every speech is like a little payback and appeal to the LNP for support in the future. The member for South Brisbane is entirely a product of the support of the LNP and with every statement the LNP gets the member for South Brisbane's support in return. The LNP members are the same as the member for South Brisbane in that they do little or nothing to hold to account the federal LNP Morrison government for its cuts to Queensland universities. On this side we back the diversity of Queensland education, from prep to tradies and our university sector.

Many may know me as a graduate not of QUT but instead of Queensland's greatest and, frankly, most prestigious university, Griffith University. I note that this place has many QUT alumni. I used to describe them, unfairly, as those who wished they were Griffith graduates. For many years people felt that QUT was simply a university for those who could not gain entry into Griffith University. I want to say this is simply not true. QUT is an exciting institution doing absolutely world-class research—I mean, no Griffith, but it is still good. It is not on the south side, but, of course, you could always try harder and come to Griffith. You could put a couple of years in at QUT and then move over to Griffith.

**Mr Kelly:** Postgraduate.

**Mr POWER:** Do a postgraduate degree, indeed. It is certainly better than that bend in the river that ruined the sugarcane farm that I am not sure of the name of. Seriously, we value the huge role that all the universities in our state play: the economic role, the export role, the research role and the social role. We recognise they make an enormous transformational impact on young students, especially those students who are the first in their family to attend university. It makes a huge contribution to the state and the city, even for those who never enter the grounds of a university. I support the bill and challenge those elected and appointed to the board to think of those in their family who are the first to be a student in the QUT institution and how much they will have their lives transformed by education at QUT.