




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 16 November 2021

QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (4.30 pm): The Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021 is an important piece of legislation that will support the governance and best practice of the university. My time as a law student at the Queensland University of Technology, from 2001 to 2006, is a time that I look back on very fondly. I note that there is a lot of history for my family with the Gardens Point campus. My dad did his carpentry apprenticeship at QIT in the sixties and my grandparents—my dad's mum and dad—met there back when the campus was the University of Queensland. There is a lot of history there for my family. I know that the university continues to provide skills and opportunities for many Queenslanders.

It was wonderful recently to get the opportunity to meet the young students from Mabel Park State High School who are gaining skills in future industries in STEM, thanks to the school's partnership with QUT to run their STEM Immersion program. It was wonderful to be there at the launch of the program. It is about giving young girls the skills and motivation to follow a career in traditionally male dominated STEM industries.

Whilst I did not do much learning about STEM whilst I studied law, I had the opportunity to be involved in the governance arrangements of the university. Like most students, I did spend a lot of my university days not studying very much and having lots of fun, but I also found myself heavily involved in the QUT Student Guild. This is a story that is familiar to a few of us in this House today. I should mention that Jess Pugh, the member for Mount Ommaney, was a friendly adversary in my student guild days. We may have been on different sides back then, but today the member for Mount Ommaney is one of the most passionate and hardworking members of the parliament, so I am glad we put that behind us and we are now friends and colleagues. I also shared my QUT student days with leaders like Brittany Lauga, the member for Keppel, someone who has absolutely landed on her feet here in parliament. We have a lot of great memories from that time.

I was fortunate to have been elected as the QUT Gardens Point campus director in 2003. I also served as the education director and in 2004 I was elected student guild president. Through these roles I had the opportunity to sit on the Academic Appeals Committee, the University Academic Board and the QUT Council. Being involved in these university governing bodies, I learnt an enormous amount about university governance and I was fortunate that a great many academics and leaders shared their experience, knowledge and wisdom with me. I would like to take this opportunity to thank lecturer Ross Daniels, who provided me with much guidance and support while he and I were both members of the QUT Council together.

Ms Lauga: A beautiful man.

Ms FENTIMAN: I take that interjection from the member for Keppel—a beautiful man. I would also like to thank Michael Lavarch, who was the dean of the Law School while I was there. I cannot talk about my time at QUT without acknowledging Professor Bill Duncan. He was a property law professor at QUT. I was fortunate enough to be his research assistant, and it is really great to work with him and his colleagues now in helping us guide our Property Law Act reforms through the parliament.

One of the big campaigns that I worked on during my time as student guild president at QUT was opposing increases to HECS, and this inevitably brought me into some conflict with the then vice-chancellor, Peter Coaldrake. I have to say, though, that he was always incredibly gracious and very patient in his dealings with me and I think at times often quite amused by our student guild tactics. I want to commend him for his time as vice-chancellor, driving the university to much success. He was a strong and passionate leader at the university. Of course, since then I have had the opportunity to work with him—in my previous portfolio when he was the chair of Jobs Queensland. I did get the opportunity to thank him for forgiving me for occupying his office that one time.

The Queensland University of Technology Council is, as it currently stands, one of the largest governing bodies of Queensland's public universities. It is reasonable and appropriate to consider best practice and to allow the university to be more in line with the voluntary code of best practice for the governance of Australian universities.

The parliamentary committee on education, employment and training received submissions from Griffith University, QUT and the National Tertiary Education Union Queensland division. In QUT's submission, they raised the benefits of a smaller committee which included more effectiveness and overall participation. The university believes that the council would be more agile in its meetings and operations which would better allow it to fulfil its responsibilities, especially during complex times such as recovery from the pandemic. QUT also noted that the proposed structure would ensure appropriate representation for the university community, importantly continuing to allow student representation. Griffith University also welcomed these amendments as they bring QUT more into line with other universities, including Griffith.

I want to note the issues raised by the NTEU in relation to the bill. The NTEU are a wonderful hardworking union, and they work incredibly hard to represent their members throughout the university sector, a sector that has felt the impact of COVID-19 heavily. The concerns of the NTEU, as outlined in their submission, related to the reduced council membership, and I note that initially a 13-member council was proposed which was subsequently increased to 15, as it currently stands in the bill, in recognition of their concerns. I understand that separate issues were raised regarding the transitional provisions relating to casual vacancies.

I am pleased to say that the government accepts recommendation 2 of the committee report to amend 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 during the current QUT Council term. This is an important bill and it will allow the council to operate more effectively. I commend the bill to the House.