



**THE HON JASON CLARE MP
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION**

SPEECH

**THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AUSTRALIA NEEDS
UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA SOLUTIONS SUMMIT**

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*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here again tonight.

It's a real privilege.

We are now on the cusp of a federal election.

And so, I think it is probably appropriate to talk tonight about where we have come over the last few years, and what comes next.

I think you know me now and what drives me.

You know I think we have got a good education system, but it can be a lot better and a lot fairer.

And I want to make it better and fairer.

The first time I spoke here I told you my own story. How I was the first person in my family to finish high school or even finish year 10.

How that wasn't really an option for people like my mum and dad when they were growing up.

How much we have changed since then.

And how that change still hasn't reached into every corner of this country or every home.

I talked about the fact that almost one in two Australians in their 30s today have a uni degree, but not everywhere.

Not where I grew up. Not amongst poor kids. Not in our outer suburbs or in the regions.

And how I want to do something about this.

I also made the point that fixing this doesn't start and end at university.

How we have got to reform our entire education system.

There's a pretty simple reason for that.

It's because the same people who aren't at your universities are the same people who aren't finishing high school.

And they are the same people who are falling behind in primary school. And never catch up.

A lot of those kids also start school behind.

And a lot of them have never set foot in a child care centre or a pre-school at all.

It is all connected.

If we are going to fix this, we have to fix all of this.

Not just because of the individual lives this will change.

But something bigger than that.

A good education changes lives.

A good education system changes countries. It's changed ours.

If you want the proof of that think about what's happened in our own lifetimes.

The big reforms of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating weren't just Super, Medicare or floating the dollar.

Under them the percentage of people who finished high school basically doubled.

From 40 percent to almost 80 percent.

One of the real privileges of being a Labor MP is I got to meet Bob and talk to him.

And he used to talk to me about this, a lot.

It was one of the things he was proudest of.

Because he knew what it did. Not just the lives it changed.

The businesses it helped create. The economy it helped build.

It was real microeconomic reform.

We're a stronger and wealthier and a better country today than we were back when I was a kid, and education is one the reasons for that.

It's the fuel in the tank.

What the Accord tells us is that the tank is only half full.

That there is more that we have to do.

That by the middle of this century we are going to need a workforce where 80 percent haven't just finished school, but they've got a trade certificate or a diploma or a uni degree as well.

That's a big change.

And that means reform.

To build the education system Australia needs.

Two and a half years ago, or so, when I got this job, this is what we were faced with.

Child care costs had skyrocketed. Up 49 percent over 10 years. Double the OECD average.

Child care workers were leaving in droves.

So were school teachers.

Billions had been ripped out of our public schools. And if you doubt me let me point you the 2014 Budget Overview, page 7. There it is in black and white.

Nothing had been done to reform what was happening in our schools.

The number of kids finishing high school was falling. Not everywhere. In particular in public schools.

School teachers were being called duds and university students were being ignored.

A lot has happened since then.

In the last two years we have cut the cost of childcare for more than 1 million families nationwide.

Now there are more kids in early education than ever before. 100,000 more.

Child care workers are also getting a 15 percent pay rise. Getting the sort of wage they deserve.

And guess what, applications are up and vacancies are down. People are coming back. Turns out when you pay people more, more people want to do the job.

A couple of weeks ago something else really important happened.

We passed laws through this place that will change the lives of some of the most disadvantaged children in Australia.

The sort of children who need access to early education the most and are the least likely to get it.

The sort of children who, because of no fault of their own, start school behind most of their classmates, because their parents don't meet the requirements of something called the Activity Test, put in place by the last Liberal Government.

The legislation we passed a few weeks ago gets rid of that test and replaces it with a three day guarantee.

A guarantee of three days a week of government supported early education and care for every child who needs it.

No one blinks when you say every child has a right to go to school and government has a responsibility to help fund it.

The same has got to be true today for early education. That doesn't mean it should be compulsory. But it should be there for every parent who wants it and every child who needs it.

To help make sure they start school ready to go. Ready to learn.

That's the sort of reform that changes lives. The sort of reform only Labor Governments do. And that our country needs.

Next is schools. What our schools need.

If we are going to hit that 80 percent target we need more people to finish school.

For most of the last decade things have been going in the wrong direction.

The number of students finishing school dropped. From 83 percent to 73 percent. That's in public schools.

Last year, for the first time in about 10 years, that percentage went up. A bit. That's a good sign, but there is a long way to go.

And that's what the agreements I have struck with States and Territories across the country are all about.

They set a target that by 2030 the proportion of students finishing high school will be the highest it has ever been.

To do that we need to fix the funding of our public schools. But not just that. That funding needs to be tied to the sort of reforms that will help young people who fall behind to catch up and keep up and finish school.

Things like evidenced-based teaching.

Things like phonics checks and numeracy checks in Year 1 to identify kids who need additional help.

And then making sure they get the help they need through individualised support, things like catch-up tutoring.

I have signed agreements now with Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, with the ACT and the NT.

And I want to do the same with Queensland and NSW.

This is the biggest new investment by an Australian Government in public schools ever.

And it's the biggest reform to school education in decades.

I am telling you this, because all of this is an indispensable part of making the Accord a reality.

Here tonight is Professor Mary O'Kane and I want to pay tribute to you again Mary.

You have provided us with a blueprint for how we can reform higher education.

It's big. Bigger than one government. 47 recommendations.

But we have already bitten off a big chunk of it. 31, in part or in full.

That includes things like Paid Prac for teachers and nurses, midwives and social work students. That starts on 1 July.

A massive expansion of enabling courses. To help get people started. That's already started.

More than doubling the number of study hubs. In the bush and now the suburbs. All of these will be open this year.

On the weekend, as part of our announcement to help more Australians see a GP for free, we also announced funding to train more GPs.

Part of that is more Commonwealth Supported Places.

It's all part of the biggest GP training program in Australian history.

We have also fixed the way student debt is indexed. That's cut the debt of three million Australians by more than \$3 billion in December last year.

And if we win the election, we will cut everyone's student debt by a further 20 percent.

It means for someone with an average student debt today of 27 grand, we will cut their debt by another \$5,500. That's a lot.

The first time I spoke at this dinner I talked about the fact that universities aren't just places where people study or work. They are also places where people live.

And I talked about sexual assault on campus and in student accommodation.

For years organisations like End Rape on Campus have been asking for someone to listen. For someone to act.

Asking for a dedicated Ombudsman.

The Accord recommended it. And now it exists.

Sarah Bendall, is the first National Student Ombudsman.

Sarah's powers are real. Like a Royal Commission. And the scope of what she covers is broad. Not just sexual violence. It covers antisemitism and all forms of racism. It covers the quality of the education and services students receive as well.

And I hope you will see the work that Sarah and her team will do as an asset. Helping to make sure students are safe and get the education they are paying for.

I also want to recognise in the room tonight the new Chief Commissioner of TEQSA, Professor Kerri-Lee Krause and congratulate her on her recent appointment, and acknowledge TEQSA's CEO, Dr Mary Russell and thank you for the work that you are doing.

Just one example of that is the roundtable we held earlier today with university leaders focussed on ongoing action to ensure universities are safe places for students and staff.

There is also another big piece of work that has just kicked off on improving university governance.

It was a recommendation of the Accord.

I have set up an Expert Council that will look at everything from how universities pay staff, to the remuneration settings of senior university staff, and report to Education Ministers later this year.

On international education, the Accord recommended a fund that universities would have to chip into based on the revenue they make.

We opted not to do that.

I proposed a cap. The Liberal Party opted not to do that.

So instead, we have got rid of Ministerial Direction 107 and replaced it with something else.

Something that is better and fairer.

Something that makes sure it's not just the big universities that get the benefit of international education.

I get how contentious this is.

How important this revenue is.

But it is not the main game.

What I am focused on, what I want all of us to focus on is how we build the sort of education system that Australia needs. That Australians need.

I spoke a moment ago about how we are building an early education system based on need.

And how we are fixing the funding of public schools so they are fully funded based on need.

And we need to apply the same model to universities.

That's what the Accord recommended, and that's what I announced in December last year.

For the first time real demand driven needs-based funding for universities. Where the money follows the student.

The evidence tells us that students in the bush and regions, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, are less likely to finish their uni degree than other students.

This is designed to fix that.

This, and the changes to the funding system that start next year, and all the other reforms we are funding already, add up to an extra \$6.7 billion injection into higher education over the next decade.

The Accord also recommended something else. Something to make sure that it doesn't gather dust or a future government doesn't just forget about it.

It recommended an ATEC. An Australian Tertiary Education Commission. An independent body to help drive and steer reform over the long term. Help break down the barriers between TAFE and university. Help implement the funding model and provide advice on pricing and a lot more.

If we win the election, I will introduce legislation in the second half of this year to formally establish the ATEC and I want it fully operational by this time next year.

But I can announce tonight the team I have appointed to get it up and running on an interim basis from the 1st of July this year.

The interim Chief Commissioner will be Professor Mary O'Kane, and she will be supported by Jobs and Skills Australia Commissioner, Barney Glover and Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt.

I am getting the band back together.

The people who wrote the Accord will help to make it real.

I started tonight by saying that we are on the cusp of an election.

I want to end by saying thank you.

Nothing is certain or permanent.

None of us are in these jobs forever.

But for the last two and a half years or so it has been a real privilege to work with you.

The UA campaign is right.

Universities do matter. To all of us.

A few days ago, I met a young woman called Narges.

She is a refugee from Afghanistan.

She fled to Pakistan when Kabul fell a few years ago.

About 18 months ago she made it here.

She now lives in Mt Druitt in western Sydney.

She speaks six languages.

The sixth is English.

She's learnt it in the last year, at TAFE.

Last year she also completed a diploma in community service.

Next week she starts at Western Sydney University. She's going to study social work.

Think about that.

After fleeing a country where girls can't even go to school anymore.

Just imagine what this young woman is capable of, and what will happen next in her life, with your help.

The lives she will change.

Now imagine a million more stories just like that.

That's what you do.

Change lives.

Change countries.

We are the best country in the world, but we can be even better.

And you are an indispensable part of making that a reality.

Turning the country of our imagination into something real.

That's exciting.

That's why I love this job.

And I really look forward to addressing this gala dinner again, this time next year.

ENDS

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