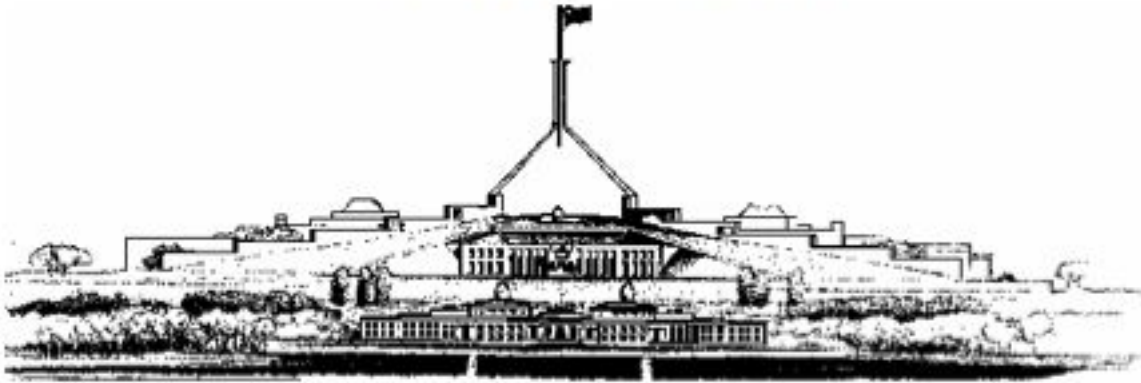




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

COMMITTEES

**Education and Employment
References Committee**

Reference

SPEECH

Thursday, 12 March 2026

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 12 March 2026	Source Senate
Page 95	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Payman, Sen Fatima	Question No.

Senator PAYMAN (Western Australia—Australia's Voice Whip) (17:23): I seek leave to amend the motion before moving it.

Leave granted.

Senator PAYMAN: I move the motion as amended in the terms circulated in the chamber:

That the following matter be referred to the Education and Employment References Committee for inquiry and report by 20 November 2026:

The rise in the number of Australian university graduates who struggle to find work after graduating, with particular reference to:

- a. the state of the entry-level job market for graduates;
- b. the quality of university education in Australia;
- c. whether graduates of Australian universities are being taught the skills that employers are looking for;
- d. the state of affairs in comparable jurisdictions;
- e. the economic, social and psychological effect that this experience has on graduates; and
- f. any other related matters.

Over the next few months, members of the class of 2025 will participate in their graduation ceremonies. Their years of recycled lectures and dead silent Zoom classes are over. It's more than likely that they've already started enjoying the fun of seeking employment in Australia today—days that seem to go on forever, waiting for a new job ad to come out, applying to the ones with fewer than three hours commute and being rejected before another human has even caught sight of your application. This seemingly endless cycle of torment impacts your self-worth. It dehumanises you. It makes you wonder why on earth you spent years studying and saddled yourself with tens of thousands of dollars of debt.

In the AI age, an alarming number of applications aren't being sent or received by humans. If you are still writing CVs and cover letters the old-fashioned way, you are risking leaving out an element of the selection criteria that your artificially enhanced competitors haven't. The entire point of a job application and interview is to determine whether someone is right for a workplace and whether the workplace is right for them. Instead, a bizarre battle of simulacra plays out, often without any humans from either side actually having read anything that the other has written or had written. Those lucky few who do find themselves employed are looking around every corner to see if the AI that helped them get the job is waiting to take it away again.

In Australia, WiseTech has just cut 2,000 jobs due to AI. Just today, Atlassian cut 1,600 jobs in a pivot to AI, although there have been allegations that AI is being used by big companies as an excuse to reduce headcount and cut costs. As reported by the *Australian Financial Review* earlier this month:

An AI system built by just three developers inside Qantas is already improving on-time performance by spotting trouble across the airline's schedule in real time. AI is already shaving a minute off every phone call to Telstra's contract centre. At LaTrobe Financial, it's lifted the productivity of the investment management giant's credit analysts by 65 per cent.

So, for some workers, it will mean getting more work done; for others, it will mean going home in the middle of the day and not knowing if they will avoid defaulting on the house next month.

Research from Indeed Hiring Lab found that graduate job postings fell by 24 per cent in 2024 and were on track at the time to fall by another 16 per cent in 2025. As supply has fallen, demand has risen. Every graduate job has hundreds of applications, and let's not pretend, even leaving AI aside, that all applications are created equal. One of my staff, who graduated a few years ago felt that he seemed to get very few interviews. One day, he decided that he would try something different. He started replacing his Middle-Eastern-sounding surname with his Irish middle name and he suddenly became a much more desirable candidate and graduate. Nothing about his skills or experience had changed, but he found himself in many more interviews than he had previously. Of course, no recruiting officer would ever tell you, 'Sorry, your CV is impressive, but it seemed like you could be brown, so I don't think this will work out.' In fact, most applicants won't even hear back after making an application. For employers, it's just more paperwork, but for jobseekers it matters. Every single minute matters. Without a response, even the dreaded email beginning with 'unfortunately', it feels like you're just throwing application after application into a big fat void.

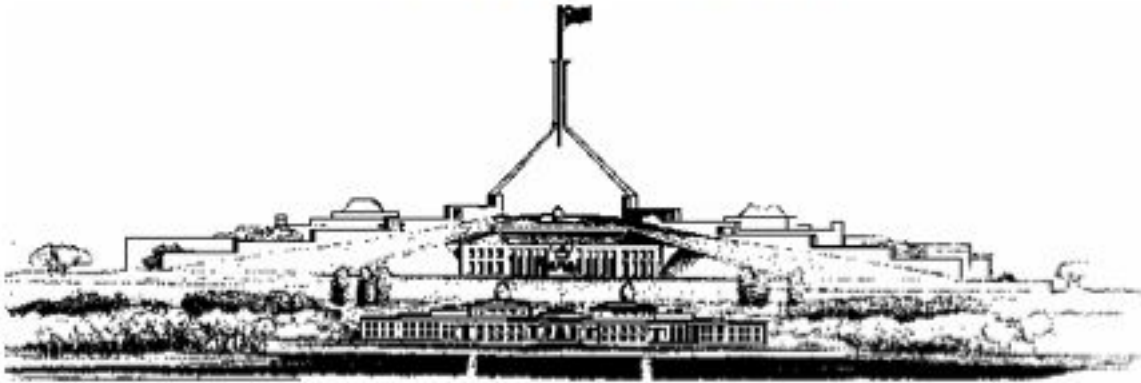
For young people, COVID marked a sharp downturn in employment outcomes. A report by the Australia Institute found that, during the pandemic, despite making up only 14 per cent of total employment, young people made up 39 per cent of job losses. This trend reversed slightly at the end of the pandemic, before falling back down again with the introduction of generative artificial intelligence. According to a Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching survey, in 2024, 26 per cent of graduates had not found full-time work within four to six months of graduating. That was up by five percentage points compared to 2023. For those who aren't able to correct this course, the consequences are devastating.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Colbeck): The time for the debate has expired. Senator Payman, you will be in continuation.



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**Education and Employment
References Committee**

Reference

SPEECH

Monday, 23 March 2026

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Monday, 23 March 2026	Source Senate
Page 92	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Payman, Sen Fatima	Question No.

Senator PAYMAN (Western Australia—Australia's Voice Whip) (18:38): I'd like to continue my remarks. For those who aren't able to correct this course, the consequences are devastating. Analysis by ACOS found that, if you spend a year out of paid work, you almost halve your chances of ever getting back into employment. It's fair enough that some will be working part time for various reasons, but there is still a shocking amount of unemployment and underemployment for young people. The national unemployment rate was 4.1 per cent in January, but the youth unemployment rate was more than double that at 9.6 per cent. Youth underemployment stood at 14.8 per cent. The young people who go to university did what they were told to do: 'Go to uni, study hard, and you'll be rewarded for that hard work.' The promise that was made to them was not kept. For those young people who somehow managed to get a job and fend off AI, what they learned at uni will often be hopelessly misaligned with the work they're actually doing.

According to 2023 statistics from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, around 40 per cent of undergraduates felt that their skills were not fully utilised in their job. This was as high as 47 per cent for women who completed STEM degrees. Obviously, this is a very tricky problem. There will not be a silver bullet for this. To figure out how we will address the problem, we really must look at it from every angle possible. We need to look at the job market for young graduates. We need to look at the skills they are being sent out into the world with compared with the skills the world wants them to have. If other countries have developed ways of addressing graduate underemployment or graduate unemployment, we need to look into them.

Most importantly, we need to understand—and our government needs to understand—what is really at stake here. In 2024, suicide was the leading cause of death for Australians aged between 15 and 44. Employment that is meaningful and purposeful is a huge part of improving the mental health of young people. When you don't have meaningful employment, when you're instead forced to endure the humiliation ritual of modern jobseeking, it weighs on your mental health. For the sake of our young people, I would urge my colleagues in this place to support this motion.

Question agreed to.