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SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT

Committee Secretary

Education and Employment References Committee

Department of the Senate

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I thank the committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

I do not intend to make a lengthy submission, as the main points that I wish to impress upon the committee were made in my contribution to my motion which gave rise to this inquiry in the Senate. I attach both parts of that contribution to this submission.

For many young Australians, their decision to attend university will be guided by their parents. For some parents, their child will be the first in their family to attend university, and so they support and encourage their progeny to pursue tertiary studies as a path to prosperity and a better life (though university is not just about becoming more employable). For others, they will have fond memories of university themselves which they want their kids to experience as well. For them, university was a place for making friends for life and expanding their world view. Some parents got all of that for free!

Any recent university graduate will tell you that it is not the idyllic home of discovery and reflection it once was. Australia's universities have, in many cases, become places of business and degree mills. The recent saga of cuts at the Australian National University, a globally-respected institution, have disrupted

people's lives, damaged ANU's reputation and, as the ABC recently reported, been found by the Australian National Audit Office in a draft report to have been unnecessary in the first place¹.

In the article, a student at ANU is quoted as saying:

We had to take courses that we never thought about, ones that don't interest us, ones that we don't necessarily think are actually beneficial to our learning.

That is a tragedy. In the precious few years before our young people are cast into decades of profit-oriented drudgery, that profit-oriented drudgery is being brought to them. Should they not have a brief reprieve from what is awaiting them for the rest of their life? No, says our tertiary education sector. They should be watching years-old recordings of lectures before being pushed out the door to do even more studying while they are looking for work, because the years-old recordings of lectures are either wholly outdated or not enough to compete in today's job market. Also, at any moment, they could be made redundant by an AI.

I have not brought on this inquiry to only look at ways to improve universities while letting employers off scot-free. The job market, particularly at the entry level, has become increasingly imbalanced in favour of the employer. Generative artificial intelligence is just one part of this. Hiring practices should be looked at. So should the state of industrial relations laws in Australia. Like most difficult problems, there are many factors (not limited to the ones mentioned above) which create negative outcomes. To give just one example of these outcomes, in April, it was reported that, since 2000, the percentage of Australians aged 25 to 34 who did not have a job because they were permanently unable to work has gone from 0.3% to 2% for men and 0.2% to 1.6% for women². These are shocking statistics. Life is not all about work, but employment is important for the self-esteem of individuals. Without it, apathy can take hold. Employers have a responsibility, as much as universities do, to do right by their workers, not just their balance sheets.

Australia has a reputation internationally as a great place to learn. We should not just rely on that reputation. Australia should actually *be* a great place to learn.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026 be amended to require the Australian Tertiary Education Commission to report on and assess the outcomes of tertiary education for graduates in the Annual State of the Tertiary Education System report, as contemplated by the amendment to that act circulated in the Senate on sheet 3717.**
- 2. That the Australian Government, as the operator of the biggest single source of Government funding for universities, the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, leverage that financial influence to ensure universities are focused on education and research, not turning a profit.**

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-30/anu-cost-cutting-national-audit-office-review-four-corners/106501952>

² 'What are they doing?': fivefold increase in young adults 'permanently unable' to work, the Australian, 12/04/2026.

- 3. That the Australian Government consider whether the data it, through various agencies and departments, collects on graduate outcomes is competent to inform it in relation to the development of tertiary education policy, or whether further data collection is necessary.**
- 4. That the Australian Government considers whether the support that it, as well as Australian universities, offers to graduates in terms of finding employment and managing their mental health is adequate.**
- 5. That the Australian Government introduce a standalone act governing artificial intelligence, particularly with regard to its use in the workplace.**