

The following Reddit post by Senator Fatima Payman prompted me to write this email: https://old.reddit.com/r/unsw/comments/1sfgk5q/senate_inquiry_into_graduate_outcomes_make_a/

I am a current Masters' student at UNSW studying Financial Technology online. I also hold a Master in Cybersecurity from ECU (Edith Cowan University) and a BA in Politics from Murdoch university. I am taking the UNSW degree because my existing Masters is frankly a joke of a degree and ECU is a shockingly poor university. I work as a software engineer full time. I have also briefly attended Monash university (Master of Computer Science) but I dropped out of Monash almost immediately as I felt the quality of the course was sub-par.

I believe, based on my personal experience, that outcomes for Australian university graduates could be improved in the following ways:

- **Reduced reliance on international student tuition fees.** This is a major issue, it's extremely common to hear reports of international students dominating university classrooms in Australia whilst lacking the requisite English skills and just generally not taking their studies seriously. These reports are very accurate and based in fact. International students frequently collaborate and cheat on every assessment, and the universities wave them through with passing marks anyway because they need the money. This cheapens the value of these degrees over time when the majority of graduates are people who didn't pay any attention in class, can't speak English, and were really only there to get a student visa so they could work or eventually apply for PR.
- **Course design at many Australian universities does not focus on academic rigor.** Rather, there is an abundance of what I refer to as fluffy, low quality "filler units". For example, I completed my Master of Cybersecurity at Edith Cowan University. This was one of the universities the federal government handed out millions of dollars to, so that it would become some sort of "center for cybersecurity excellence" or something, as I recall. Well I can tell you that money must have gone into someone's pocket, because a cybersecurity degree should be filled with hard, technical courses that prepare you for the workplace, but instead it was filled with a lot of nonsense like "project management". Such units contribute almost nothing to hirability in a technical discipline, but Australian universities are almost proud of their lack of STEM rigor in this regard. These units often replace core technical competencies (for example, units based heavily around programming or mathematics) to make the degree "accessible" to a wider (paying) audience, which directly degrades graduate outcomes in competitive fields like cybersecurity.

- **Take a note out of the book of universities in the US, and actually have masters degrees involve studying ADVANCED topics.** Take a look at Monash's online master of computer science curriculum. It doesn't even include data structures & algorithms, which is literally the core of computer science. It doesn't include linear algebra, calculus, probability & statistics, yet it includes machine learning courses that should be built on those mathematical foundations. It doesn't require them as prerequisites either. At ECU, their Master of Computer Science included a class called "current topics in computer science" that I dropped out of, because the lecturer, in a COMPUTER SCIENCE COURSE, couldn't figure out how to share their screen and set up their audio properly to show the class powerpoint presentations to online students. I mean, are you kidding me? How is stuff like this happening at accredited universities? How is someone teaching a computer science course, but they don't know how to share their screen. Just mind boggling really.
- **AI usage should not be tolerated.** It's already bad enough that these AI tools allow students to cheat so easily, because research has shown that outsourcing your thinking to these chatbots has a real, detrimental impact on learning and cognitive ability. But what makes it 10 times worse is that some universities are actually EMBRACING this. UNSW, for example, has signed some sort of deal with OpenAI. Late last year, there was an incident where a student studying a Master of Applied Finance online at UNSW (very close to the degree I'm taking, a lot of unit overlap) posted a screenshot on twitter of his lecturer provided feedback on an essay, which began with "ChatGPT said". Obviously the student was rightfully upset with paying \$5000 per 6 week course (yes it's that expensive) and then not even having a human be bothered to read their assessment. I could sit at home and have ChatGPT tell me how great my essay is all day, that's not education and it's worth exactly \$0. I reported this incident to the school and they said they were "taking it seriously" but I'm yet to see anyone get fired for what is clearly, without a doubt, grounds for immediate termination in my view. I'd also like to add here that this is a school that frequently subjects students to AI-usage academic integrity investigations and requires them to do invasive things such as supply their entire internet browsing history. It comes across as very unfair when the standard for teachers is not as high.