

My submission focuses on the growing disconnect between university education, graduate employment outcomes, wages, and working conditions in Australia.

I believe the current discussion around graduate outcomes focuses too heavily on whether graduates find employment, instead of examining the quality, sustainability, and value of that employment.

The state of the entry-level job market for graduates is becoming increasingly difficult. Many graduates enter industries with long working hours, high stress, unpaid overtime expectations, and salaries that no longer reflect the cost of living in Australia. In my own experience within the construction industry, graduate and professional staff are commonly expected to work 10-hour days onsite, combined with around 2 hours of daily commuting. Despite this, wages often do not provide financial stability after rent, transport, fuel, and student debt repayments.

A major concern is that many of these excessive working hours no longer translate into meaningful improvements in workers' lives. Large corporations and major companies continue increasing profits while many workers struggle to afford housing, reduce debt, or build financial security. At the same time, significant corporate profits are increasingly being reinvested into property and asset ownership, contributing to rising living costs and reduced affordability for ordinary Australians.

If this trend continues, many workers will increasingly feel trapped in a system where they work longer hours simply to survive, while the financial benefits continue flowing upward to large corporations and asset owners rather than the broader community.

I believe this directly conflicts with the social purpose behind taxation and economic contribution in Australia. Most workers accept paying tax because they believe it supports the community, public services, infrastructure, and social stability. However, many Australians now feel that workers are carrying a growing burden while large corporations continue minimising tax obligations and retaining disproportionate profits for private gain.

There must be greater focus on ensuring economic growth benefits workers and communities, not only corporations and shareholders.

I also believe the quality of university education in Australia should be examined more closely. Universities provide strong theoretical education, but there is often a gap between academic learning and the practical realities of the workforce. Many graduates enter employment without sufficient preparation for industry expectations, workplace pressures, project delivery environments, or financial realities.

There should also be greater examination of whether graduates are being taught the skills employers are genuinely seeking. In many industries, employers increasingly expect graduates to already possess practical experience, advanced software knowledge,

communication skills, project coordination abilities, and site-based understanding before even entering the workforce. This creates unrealistic expectations for entry-level employees.

I believe Australia should also compare graduate employment systems and workplace standards with comparable international jurisdictions. Countries discussing reduced working hours, stronger work-life balance protections, affordable housing access, and wage protections are responding more directly to the pressures facing younger generations.

The economic, social, and psychological effects on graduates are significant. Many graduates experience:

- Financial stress despite full-time employment
- Delayed home ownership and family planning
- Burnout from excessive working hours and commuting
- Declining confidence in professional industries
- Mental stress caused by job insecurity and rising living costs

I also wish to raise concerns regarding the role of [Engineers Australia](#). In my experience, many engineers feel there is limited practical support or representation regarding workplace conditions, wage concerns, and industry pressures. There is a growing perception among professionals that the organisation operates more as a corporate body than as an advocate for engineers working in the industry. I believe this contributes to frustration among graduates and professionals who feel they lack meaningful representation.

In my opinion, several reforms should be considered:

- Requiring wages to increase in line with inflation as a minimum standard
- Introducing a 4-day work week
- Reducing standard working hours to 6 hours per day
- Providing tax-free income for students working up to 20 hours per week while studying
- Increasing government oversight of workplace standards and enforcement against exploitation
- Creating incentives for graduates to work in regional areas through land or housing support after completing a period of service

- Stronger review of corporate tax practices and worker protections to ensure economic growth benefits the wider community

Reducing excessive working hours and improving employment conditions would improve quality of life, increase employment opportunities, and reduce long-term pressure on welfare systems and taxpayers.

My submission reflects concerns shared by many graduates who feel that obtaining a degree no longer guarantees financial stability, career progression, or reasonable working conditions.