



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

MEDIA RELEASE

UNIVERSITY SHAKE UP NEEDED

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

22 January 2021

The Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education has today tabled its report into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector. The report makes 39 recommendations, including that the NSW Government:

- Put an end to ‘Kangaroo Courts’ on university campuses, ensuring that the rule of law and the processes of the NSW criminal justice system are respected by universities in dealing with alleged sexual offences.
- Empower the NSW Auditor General to play a more proactive role in identifying poor university financial management, especially on the issue of over-reliance on international student income.
- Take steps to protect freedom of speech on university campuses, such as codifying the Robert French provisions in NSW legislation.
- Foster a more competitive higher education sector to enhance student choice and accessibility through new entrants to the system.
- Prioritise support for Country University Centres, which have been a tremendous success in NSW for improving access to higher education.

Commenting on the inquiry, the Committee Chair, the Hon Mark Latham MLC observed: 'During the inquiry, the committee heard that international student revenue was as high as 63 per cent of one NSW university's total revenue in 2019. This high level of financial reliance on foreign student fees exposes NSW universities to financial risks, as we have seen during the COVID pandemic. For this reason, the Committee recommends that the Government work with its Federal counterpart and universities to diversify universities' revenue to avoid over-reliance on international student fees. The NSW Auditor-General should also audit and publish data relating to the international education sector to assist universities with their financial decision making.'

'The Covid-19 experience has exposed the university sector to new financial pressures and challenges. In some cases, universities have left themselves over-exposed to the withdrawal of foreign student income, which they had built up over many years to expand their research entitlement and reputation. This financial recklessness must end, especially at Sydney and NSW Universities, which have drawn nearly 30 per cent of their total revenue from just one country: China'.

'In some respects, the impact of Covid-19 has been a circuit breaker for reassessing the financial and other policies of our universities, and the State legislation that empowers them. The Committee Inquiry and recommendations have been very timely indeed, especially as the Berejiklian Government finalises its new Higher Education Strategy', Mr Latham said.

'In evidence, some inquiry participants spoke of the infringement of freedom of speech on campuses and the use by universities of internal disciplinary systems to make determinations on alleged criminal behaviours. The Committee considers it is critically important for universities to uphold Australia's democratic values and follow the processes of the NSW criminal justice system in dealing with alleged criminal offences. There should be no more Kangaroo Courts.'

The Committee recommends that the NSW Government review its legislative framework relating to universities' practices concerning these issues', Mr Latham added.

'The Committee believes that tertiary education should be more accessible, particularly to students from regional, remote and lower socio-economic areas, and that it should be delivered according to best practice. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the NSW Government prioritise additional support for the Country University Centre (CUC) model in its forthcoming Higher Education Strategy', Mr Latham concluded.

Information about the inquiry is available on our [website](#).

-ENDS-

For further information please contact Committee Chair, the Hon Mark Latham MLC, on 9230 3682.