

**Submission  
No 7**

**INQUIRY INTO FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NSW  
TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR**

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Universities are currently central to the search for a vaccine to combat COVID-19. Nothing could make it any clearer that a strong university sector is essential for the well being of the whole community. This is unlikely to be the last pandemic. If we defund the universities, we sabotaged our chances of dealing quickly with the next major health challenge.

Universities can and must play a more important role in our society than simply imparting the skills to people that will enable them to get a paying job and cover their life expenses.

It's in the interests of the whole community to make tertiary education free to anyone who has the academic skills to tackle it and provide the opportunity for people of all walks of life to be part of exploring and researching the big questions then enable us to shape our society in the future. We need more than worker drones. We need people who are prepared for the future even though we don't yet know what it is. Fewer people than ever are staying in any particular job or even career path for more than a couple of years. Sometimes that's by choice but very often it's not. We need people who have the transferable skills that enable them to deal with the constant changes we face.

Training and retraining at both University and TAFE needs to be available to everyone across their working life span. People need to develop skills like effective communication, critical thinking, teamwork, planning and project management to function well in the changing work environment and education is often a significant part of that.

I've worked in the VET sector and know first hand just how profit driven it is. I was an English as a second language teacher. I was frequently told to put students up to the next class not because they had developed their skills to a suitable point but because they were the customers and that was what they wanted. When the role of profit is too strong in education, the quality of education suffers. My bosses didn't care whether the students or any employers who took them on based on the qualifications they gained with us got what they paid for. Before COVID19, education was one of Australia's biggest export markets. It's in our interest to ensure that we continue to offer a quality education.

We need security of employment in the education sector so that quality staff are developed and retained. Without this I am concerned that we may see a shortage of university educators in the future. Students need sufficient support via youth allowance to enable them to study without worrying about how to pay the rent and can focus on excelling in their studies. There also needs to be sufficient funding for classes small enough to enable students to interact with their teachers. These are becoming rare.

Education is a time when people should be free to explore different ideas. Freedom of speech should not be limited by corporate interests and student politics should be able to thrive. After all, we will continue to need a constant flow of new MPs as well as entrepreneurs and public servants who can develop creative ways to deal with future challenges.

I urge you to protect our educational institutions from becoming places that turn out cookie cutter workers with limited skills. We need a workforce and a society with the skills to cope with constant change and to get that we need a strong, vibrant, varied and independent education sector.