

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 24 July 2020

Partially
Confidential

Sydney, 24 July 2020

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION, NSW Parliament:

Ref: Inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector

Dear members of the Committee:

I am writing as an academic and university instructor working in higher education institutions since 1999. I have worked at six universities since 2009 in New South Wales as tutor, convenor and lecturer in more than 20 subjects, belonging to Media Studies, sociology and history.

I am writing in direct relation to the following terms of reference of your inquiry:

(c)The post-pandemic return of foreign student numbers and the financial sustainability and risk management strategies of NSW tertiary education institutions;

(d)The quality of university teaching and research, including the extent and impact of insecure employment in the sector;

(h)The current levels of coordination and/or support provided to NSW universities by the NSW Government

(j) The appropriateness of current NSW legislation regulating, overseeing and enabling tertiary education;

and (k)Any other related matters.

About term (c):

I graduated with a PhD in Media Studies from Macquarie University in 2013 and a PhD in Latin American Studies in 2011 from the University of Santiago, Chile. When I started teaching in 2009, I immediately noticed the financial risk and poor planning by management at the different universities where I worked, which used a highly casualised workforce and exploitative work conditions, risking the quality of education through an extremely short-term and perilous 'business' strategy, applied to public institutions. The dependence on international students' cash flows was clearly evident, and the lack of investment or minimum care on the main mission of any university, which is to teach and learn, has been patently clear through the underpayments and wage theft conditions of most teaching staff. Casualised staff, who teach the majority of courses since a long time ago, have *always* been hired a few weeks or a few days before classes started, and have been asked to do countless free or non-paid work hours of marking and planning of lessons. There has been a widespread lack of educational standards or of any consistent and proper planning for course improvements, due to the inherently unstable hiring conditions of those who teach every year.

The total dependence on short-term cash flows evidently precipitated and left bare all this in 2020 when most NSW university claimed bankruptcy at the exact moment of international students not coming back, all from one month to the next (January to February 2020). The lack of reserves, the complete mismanagement of resources and obvious improvisation seen through the constant hiring and firing of teaching staff every single semester or term, caused the current crisis. I have been a witness and a subject of that mismanagement for 11 years.

About term (c):

The quality of teaching and research are strictly related to this extreme casualisation of the sector, with underpaid and precariously employed university workers doing by far most of the teaching. Any teaching or employment issue that any casualised staff could raise about the impact of working conditions on student learning conditions has been systematically denied by a non-transparent and prone to nepotism system of hirings and renewals. PhD candidates dependent on supervisors have been the main victims, for whom to raise an issue is impossible as they have become workers

who had their theses' supervisors also as their employers. Casualised academics in their constant search for jobs and teaching availability of jobs have been also pushed and determined to leave research aside, within a system that allows permanent staff to develop research, as their teaching workloads are taken by casualised staff. This has created a vicious circle and a two-tier system, with permanent staff always gaining more job security as the focus on research and publishing has become a marketing exercise promoted by universities.

About terms h) and j)

It has become clear for all Australians that the current dependence and lack of funding by the federal government for universities across all states is an unaccountable and dysfunctional system. As said, there has been wage theft occurring at ALL universities with branches in NSW territory for decades now. There has been no oversight on universities in NSW with casualised staff as me working for many consecutive years without our employers recognising us as continuing employees, even if we teach the same classes and content repeatedly for up to 4 years in my case, without sick leave, paid holidays nor penalty rates.

About term k)

I have taught countless subjects to hundreds of NSW students. I taught, for example, how to understand today's mediated world so they could learn to discriminate truthful information from unreliable sources. During the last 4 years I was the convenor and lecturer of a Latin American history class that explained why statues are being demolished today around the world (as the first region colonised by European empires) and how modern racism was invented in that historical process and in that continent. I also helped student to understand how Australia's wealth is highly dependent on the exploitation of mineral resources in Chile or Brazil, and why we need to understand those countries if Australia aims to have one of our five top taxpayers to keep financing our roads, health care system and primary and secondary education.

I dedicated my life to Australian students, accruing highly scoring evaluations in all my classes. My industry is education, so there is no excuse to keep arguing that casualisation is a 'link' to industries. I have been making between 10,000 and 30,000 dollars a year for over a decade.

Australia is today about to decide if it will be known as a developed nation with a decently funded university system or if it will risk its future by training many future generations with a funding and conditions proper from a Third World nation. Casualisation in universities is one of the highest of any sector in Australia; it is a national disgrace, a shame and international embarrassment. And all this has happened within NSW territory, in violation of state labour laws and with institutions operating within NSW laws. It is about time that NSW Parliament leads the example and at the very least COUNTS how many of us are doing the teaching at universities, how many are hired and fired every single semester, and, above all, stops the wage theft, job insecurity and miseducation of thousands of young Australians by teachers with poverty-level salaries.

I am available to widen my testimony as anonymous witness and subject of your inquiry.

All the best,