

Shane King MP

State Member for Kurwongbah



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Professor Mary O'Kane AC
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Dear Professor

I wish to make this short contribution to the *Australian Universities Accord*, a Review of the higher education system.

As a Member of the Queensland State Parliament, I have a keen interest in the intersection between the education policies and responsibilities of our State and the Commonwealth. I am particularly interested in the general accessibility of higher education, as well as practical outcomes for constituents in the Kurwongbah electorate, where less than 17% of respondents reported a bachelor degree or higher as their level of highest educational achievement in the 2021 Census.

I am very proud to be part of the Labor State Government who helped bring to life the Moreton Bay Region's first university – the University of the Sunshine Coast's (USC's) Petrie campus – through a state-owned land swap with Council. This campus, expected to be home to 10,000 students across over 100 degrees by 2030, is located within my electorate and the value it has already brought to our community in three short years – most of them constrained by COVID-19 risks and restrictions – is our reward.

We know that accessibility of higher education is a great motivator for school leavers to choose that path – 'we can't be what we can't see'. We also know that a *lack* of accessibility is both a deterrent to choosing higher education, and a factor in non-completion rates. In Moreton Bay, we've now achieved physical accessibility by working together across all levels of government – not only through the allocation of the land next to the Petrie train station, but also through joint investment in local public and active transport corridors.

As an electrician, Vocational Education and Training (VET) has been a feature of my personal story. I appreciate the value of VET and its appeal for students who may not feel academically inclined enough for university. We shouldn't overlook any opportunities for the creation of more partnerships and pathways between VET providers (especially TAFE), higher education providers, and high schools – through more sharing of physical, cyber, and human resources, and through better recognition of prior learning (RPL) practices. These partnerships should be designed to benefit students in regional and remote areas where physical attendance at university and/or VET institutes is challenging or impractical.

In addition, it would be interesting to explore the merits of a 'Gonski-style' funding model for higher education with the goal of increased participation and graduation rates across under-represented groups, such as residents in regional and remote areas; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations; students from low socio-economic backgrounds and/or poorer geographical locations; and students identifying with mental health issues.

The affordability of housing can also be a barrier to higher education and, similarly, the rising cost of living expenses such as groceries, energy, internet access, transport, and childcare. These are challenges with policy levers at both State and Federal levels and I welcome the new conversations occurring about short- and long-term solutions for these complex problems, between the States, Territories, and the Albanese Government.

Finally, I want to support some of the themes in the USC submission to this review, with regard to research, red tape and the definition of 'regional'.

Representing an outer metro electorate means I'm familiar with conflict between people's perception of regional vs the identifying features of a 'region' vs how funding decisions makers (eg. governments) define a region. I think the higher education system – among other systems – would benefit from consistency in the definition.

With regard to government funding for research, I agree with USC that better alignment between State and Federal funding could be achieved. I would also like to see a fairer distribution of funding for research programs outside of the big three universities in Queensland.

Finally, I welcome any opportunities to reduce red tape that arise from this review, and the conversations it opens between all layers of government, all facets of our education systems, and with the business community in Queensland and Australia. I look forward to advocating for any recommended changes the Queensland Government could make in this regard.

Yours sincerely,



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