

Open letter to the Australian Prime Minister, the Hon. Kevin Rudd calling for revolution in higher education

Dear Prime Minister

Your victory speech re-affirmed education as a key priority for the future of this country. We believe that a true education revolution must include a new wave of higher education reform – reform that will redress the imbalances that have characterized the sector over the last decade or more. Such reform should redirect resources back into the core university activities of teaching and research. We urge your immediate attention and commitment to the following:

- Slim down and simplify the requirements of the higher education bureaucracy, and thus reduce university administrative costs.
- Provide world-class university education for our future generations through full government funding for the sector's teaching-related expenditures – including education at the honours and postgraduate levels.
- Reduce universities' dependence on overseas full-fee students – a practice that has led to the emergence of cash-crop education programs which have damaged Australia's reputation in education.
- Repeal the previous government's VSU legislation, to ensure an active and full student experience.
- Revive Australia's faltering international standing in innovative research by increasing funding for competitive research projects in all areas.

In our experience, excessive emphasis has been given in recent years to increasing bureaucratic control over teaching and research in universities. The many layers of university bureaucracy, and their demands, have reduced the efficiency and creativity of our teachers and researchers, and have led to widespread demoralisation in the sector. The attacks on student unionism have undermined the integrity of universities as communities of learning. A significant step towards revitalization would be to redirect much-needed resources into teaching and research – the core business of universities – and to recover the idea of the university as a place that builds the values and civic virtues for the Australian society of the future.

Australia's universities should stand at the very centre of any serious plan for the country's future. Yet government investment in higher education has declined and Australia is spending well below the OECD average in research and development. To regain competitiveness with other comparable OECD economies, a revolution for the Australian higher education sector is urgently needed, one that will make our universities the first choice for our future generations of educators and researchers.

As senior Australian academics, we call upon your government to honour its commitment to the future by rebuilding the higher education system, and restoring our once strong reputation in education, research and innovation.

Yours sincerely

Senior Australian academics