

PRESS RELEASE

Top Academics Call for Higher Education Revolution

In an open letter to the new PM Kevin Rudd, one hundred of Australia's leading university lecturers and researchers call for a "revolution in higher education". The letter, signed by senior academics across the country, attacks the many layers of bureaucratic control in universities, which, they claim, have reduced the efficiency and stifled the creative energies of teachers and researchers, and have led to widespread demoralisation in the sector in recent years. Arguing that Australia has fallen behind the other OECD countries in its investment in higher education and innovation, the letter urges the new government to redirect resources back into "teaching and research – the core business of universities".

The letter puts forward five initiatives: (1) Slim down higher education bureaucracy and reduce university administrative costs. (2) Provide "world-class education for our future generations" through full government funding for the sector's frontline teaching-related expenditures, including education at the honours and postgraduate levels. (3) Reduce universities' dependence on overseas full-fee students, a practice that, they claim, has led to the emergence of "cash-crop" education programs which have damaged Australia's reputation in education. (4) Repeal the previous government's VSU legislation, to ensure "an active and full student experience", and to recover the idea of the university as "a place that builds the values and civic virtues" for the future Australian society. (5) Revive Australia's "faltering international standing" in innovative research by increasing funding for competitive research projects in all areas.

Signatories to the open letter include some of Australia's academic superstars in the sciences, engineering, computing, architecture, social sciences and the arts. "The letter expresses very real, and widely shared, concerns across the sector on the present state of higher education", said Prof Jeff Malpas, one of the organizers of the letter. "The problems it identifies are debilitating and widespread. It is part of the everyday experience of university teachers and researchers that the demands and controls from the higher education bureaucracy are hindering the education and research missions of universities." Some of the signatories are deans, heads of schools and departments, directors of research centres, or hold other senior management positions in the universities. "These people know the problems at first hand," said the letter's co-organiser, Prof Andrew Brennan, "and the problems are getting worse all the time. The challenge is for Kevin Rudd to bring the education revolution all the way up to the universities, and combine his vision on education with Labor's razor on the bloated and debilitating bureaucracy. We look forward to working with the new government to achieve its education reform, and to regaining Australia's once strong reputation in education, research and innovation."

The open letter is available at <http://academics-australia.org> . New signatories from senior Australian academics in all disciplines are welcomed.

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