

29 July 2008

46 Princes Street,
Ryde NSW 2112

Dear HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERT REVIEW PANEL,

Please regard this letter as my submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education.

I graduated from a major University in Sydney in 2004 with a BA majoring in Psychology and in 2005 with an LLB with second degree honours. Having commenced my studies in 1987 with a ten year break from 1992-2002, I have attained a strong perspective on the state of Higher Education in Australia.

My personal view is that Higher Education in Australia is in a parlous state, and is in fact, a national disgrace. In 1991, the first year of law at University was a course entitled the History and Philosophy of Law. It was conducted in small discussion groups in which students were graded on participation in each session and learning was based on the Socratic method of personal interactions between teachers and students. There were no lectures. This was a highly successful method of learning and of differentiating between students who were ready, willing and able to prepare and participate and those who were not, the latter achieving poor or failing grades.

However, upon my return to study in 2002, the Socratic method had largely been replaced by lectures in which law students were passively lectured to, lecture notes were available over the internet and although participation in tutorial sessions was encouraged, it was not enforced.

Furthermore, due to the policy of presumptive marking quotas, students' marks were inflated and grades allocated that in no way reflected the poor standard of work in examinations and assessment tasks. In one course in particular in 2004, a course entitled Business Organisations, about 90 per cent of students failed the course, including me. However, after presumptive marking quotas had been applied and grades marked upwards, I achieved a mark of 65 which counted as a Credit.

So, I have personally witnessed students who did not actively participate in the learning process graduate with degrees in Law.

I am very concerned that with the institution of HECS, a user-pays mentality has infiltrated higher education in Australia in which students expect passing grades because of the payment of fees and universities are awarding passing grades to students who have not earned them to ensure compatibility with other universities and the continuation of government funding.

My overriding concern is that the result of all of the above is a dramatic decrease in the standards of higher education in Australia. Through talking to friends and colleagues in other universities in Australia, I believe my experiences to be endemic and not in the least isolated.

At least part of the solution to the problems is to increase the number of students into courses like law and fail half of the intake, to enforce a high standard of achievement. Australian universities

should follow the lead of Melbourne University in teaching law and institute Socratic teaching methods, abolish lectures and abolish presumptive marking quotas.

Yours sincerely,

PHILIPPA FINDLAY, BA LLB (Hons)