



Amanda Rishworth MP

Member for Kingston

Speech to Federal Parliament

18 August 2009

Higher Education Support Amendment (2009 Budget Measures) Bill 2009

Ms Rishworth (Kingston) (6:49 PM) —I am very pleased to speak on the [Higher Education Support Amendment \(2009 Budget Measures\) Bill 2009](#). Since coming to government in late 2007, this government has shown that it is squarely committed to improving education outcomes in this country. Indeed the budget that was delivered earlier on this year has once again delivered for and focused on delivering education opportunities and outcomes from early childhood right through to adult education. The budget was really dedicated to lifelong learning for all Australians. This is true for a number of different areas, including our tertiary education system.

Last year the government took the very bold step of actually commissioning Denise Bradley, a very widely regarded tertiary educator, to conduct the Bradley review of higher education. That review made it clear that urgent investment was needed and reform was also needed to make sure that our university system was world-class. This government's policy and this bill represent our response to the challenge issued by this review—the challenge of ensuring that there is quality in our tertiary education sector and that this quality is maintained to support the continued economic and social progress of the nation.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (2009 Budget Measures) Bill 2009 amends the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to implement the Australian government's reforms to higher education and the whole system. The bill also amends the act to give effect to measures to address key findings and recommendations of the review of the national innovation system and the recent House of Representatives inquiry into research, training and workforce issues. As a member of that committee that heard significant evidence on things that could be improved, I am very pleased that the government has taken up these issues and acted—compared to 12 years of neglect by the previous government, who seemed to think that education reform was about ripping money out of universities and ripping money off students.

This bill represents the launch of the government's reform agenda in tertiary education, and I must commend the Deputy Prime Minister for driving this agenda and this vision. The reforms proposed by this bill

transform Australia's higher education sector, providing unprecedented opportunities and quality in university education, unmatched in Australia's history. These reforms are part of an integrated policy approach to higher education, and the government's policy involves structural change to our university system, improves the financial sustainability of our universities and guarantees quality education and research outcomes.

Most importantly, under this bill the government will provide funding for growth in universities and will do so by opening the doors of universities to students from all walks of life. It is these people, our future workforce, who are finally, thanks to the government and this bill, at the centre of the higher education funding system. I know from my own electorate, where not as many students end up going to university as perhaps do in other parts of Adelaide, that this has been widely welcomed by parents and schools hoping that their students will get an opportunity and find tertiary education attractive.

This bill is part of a broader investment in higher education. We know that in the last budget we saw significant investment and in the budget this year there was another significant investment. This broader investment has been welcomed by many South Australians. They have welcomed the \$200 million for the Health and Medical Research Institute which was announced in the May budget. This institute will provide world-class facilities and make a significant contribution to our national and international research in the medical area. The investment has been welcomed by all three universities in Adelaide. As the Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University, Professor Michael Barber, said:

The Institute will encourage collaborations between the various parties, draw on the skills and strengths in our respective institutions, and produce positive results from an enhanced research effort.

New and innovative research will help solve the medical mysteries that compromise the health and lifestyle of our people and communities.

I sincerely wish everyone involved in the institute the best for their important work.

Similarly, Flinders University was deserving and received two grants from the Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects scheme for an investigation into Australian crop species and for research into climate change. This climate change research will focus on the patterns of gene flow at a landscape scale in declining and common birds in Australia and abroad. The project builds on a strong international link to the Galapagos Islands as well as having a regional focus for South Australia. The outcome will also inform climate modelling for the state and Australia and will prove incredibly useful for governments in proposing measures to adapt to climate change. I would like to congratulate Flinders University

on being very successful in receiving these grants. It is another example of the government really investing in our higher education system.

It is research like this that will be an integral part of our universities. In recognition of this, the bill amends the act to provide appropriate funding for continuing Commonwealth scholarships and other research grants. Specifically, the Australian government will commit \$512 million over four years for a new Sustainable Research Excellence in Universities initiative to address the gap in funding for the indirect costs of research. This is in addition to the joint research engagement measures which will create a funding stream that prioritises and provides incentives for collaboration between universities, industry and other end users to produce the highest quality and most useful research outcomes.

These outcomes are driven by the people in our tertiary education system, and that is why this bill focuses on giving as many talented people as possible the opportunity to study, research and develop new ideas. To this end, from 2012 all public universities will be funded on the basis of student demand. This means uncapping the amount of places in particular courses and allowing the interest of students to determine how much funding our universities should receive.

To ensure that universities have time to prepare for the new demand driven system, the current funding floor for universities will be maintained for the years 2010 and 2011. The current cap on overenrolment will be raised from five to 10 per cent in funding terms for 2010-11. These are important first steps to realising a higher education system that is well resourced enough and accessible enough to achieve this government's ambition of increasing the proportion of 25- to 34-year-old Australians with a bachelor level qualification to 40 per cent by 2025.

It is with this similar ambition that the government strives to support our best and brightest postgraduate students through its commitment to doubling the number of Australian postgraduate awards by 2012. Building on this commitment, the value of the APA stipend will be increased by more than 10 per cent, from \$20,427 in 2009 to \$22,500 in 2010. I notice the member for Tangney is also in the chamber tonight. As members of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation, we looked into some of the barriers to research around our country. We know that the amount of the APA stipend was regularly raised as an issue that needed to be addressed, and I am very pleased that this government is taking steps to address it.

This commitment to opportunity is also represented in the bill's landmark measures to improve the rate of participation in higher education by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As I said earlier, this move has certainly been welcomed by many schools in my electorate. The bill does this by injecting additional funding for universities to support low-

SES students participating in higher education. This follows the international experience, which shows the importance of outreach in the early years of secondary schooling in inspiring university education aspirants.

I would just like to make a comment about one initiative that already exists in my local area, and that is Christies Beach High School and its relationship with Flinders University. The university has available space and computers for students from the local area to use who might be studying at university. It also enables those students to interact with university students who are perhaps not unlike themselves and to make that connection between the school and the university just down the road.

Another part of this initiative is why the government is allocating \$108 million over four years for a new partnerships program, to link universities with low-SES schools and vocational education and training providers. As I mentioned, Flinders University of South Australia has already been actively engaged in looking at these programs and certainly this extra funding will have a significant impact on some of the schools in my electorate. This funding will expose students to the opportunities on offer at universities, whether it be the University of South Australia, Adelaide University or Flinders University. It will allow them to have hands-on activities provided by the program and therefore that connection will most likely lead them to enrol in university. Getting into university, however, will not happen due to inspiration alone, so the government has allocated \$325 million over four years to provide universities with a financial incentive to expand their enrolment of low-SES students and to fund the intensive support needed to improve their completion and retention rates.

The existing Higher Education Equity Support Program will be replaced and incorporated into these new funding arrangements. In addition to this bill, the government is also introducing major reforms to student income support to assist access and retention of low-SES students. I think this is an incredibly important initiative, because for too long under the coalition government people who perhaps wanted to go to university but were disadvantaged due to where they lived or the income of their parents could not access, or were not encouraged to access, higher education. These important initiatives will allow many more students to be able to access higher education and perhaps fulfil a dream. For a lot of them, it will be the first time that anyone in their family has gone to university. It is an initiative that will be welcomed by many people in my electorate.

This bill is comprehensive in its approach to initiating Labor's reform of the higher education sector in this country. The bill ends a decade of underfunding. It ends the decline in investment in education and it ends the political interference with research. It begins a series of reforms that will see more students at better funded universities, undertaking better

resourced and more independent research for the benefit of Australian society as a whole. I can see that the Minister for Sport is in the chamber and I know that she has a very good relationship with Professor Ian Chubb, the President of the International Alliance of Research Universities. He said:

Of course, Grumblers will say there should have been more, but let's be realistic here. An investment of more than \$5 billion in higher education and research is to be celebrated. Let's get on with the job of using the investment wisely.

This bill does mark a huge investment in our higher education sector and I am sure that these investments will be made wisely. I am also sure that this bill marks the beginning of increased support, attention and focus on making Australia's universities truly world class, and I commend the bill to the House.