

UNIVERSITIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016

Third Reading

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [11.09 am]: I move —

That the bill be now read a third time.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [11.10 am]: The Universities Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 is legislation that the universities have wanted. I thank the government for agreeing to the amendments on the student guilds' 50 per cent annual amenities and service fees. The guilds made their point clear on that. This bill will allow universities greater freedom in exploring commercial activities. In the modern society they are going to have to because of less reliance on government or public funding. That is very important. However, the point was made in various speeches in the second reading debate and by the Premier himself that university education is much more than just instruction in a classroom; it is the whole university experience. I am a former academic and a student of many universities. I am the only member of my family who went to university, but I made up for the lack of university education of my siblings; I have a degree for each of them! I have studied at four different universities, two in Australia and two overseas. I worry about the trend in Australia, at least, for people to receive lectures online. The University of Adelaide in South Australia has removed all face-to-face lectures—it is all done online now—but it is increasing tutorials. If the tutorials are structured properly and they are small-class tutorials, maybe the university can get away with online lecturing. However, I know that at the University of Western Australia some tutes have 30 or 40 people. That is not a tute in my opinion. I know we cannot adopt the Oxford–Cambridge model of two or three people in a tute, but a tute should have no more than 10 people. I do worry about this. I tried to fight it when I was a lecturer by not putting my lectures online. However, in the end the system defeated me and I think it is basically compulsory now for all mandatory courses at universities to go online. That is a real worry.

Another point the Premier made, with which I concur, is that it is a whole of university experience. In America and the United Kingdom students go away from home for university: they go to another city or another state. Perhaps in the United States it is changing a little because of the cost of university courses and it is cheaper for a student to be educated at a public university in their state. Generally, however, people move away. They live away from home, often on the college campus, and they receive a very enriched experience. We have to be careful; we are limited in what we can do as a Parliament, but I am really concerned about the way university education is moving.

I have one final point: the member for Victoria Park said that he would like to see universities in Western Australia engage more in public debate. In the US academics are often sought out for public comment and they drive the public policy debate. That does not seem to happen in Western Australia to the same extent. I commend the bill to the house and I thank the Premier for the way the bill was handled.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [11.11 am] — in reply: I simply thank members opposite for their support of the Universities Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. It covers a range of areas. As the member just said, the universities have wanted this legislation for many years. It will give them greater flexibility to operate as universities. It was a good debate and I thank members.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.