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The Chairperson,
Joint Committee on the Establishment of Adelaide University
The Hon. Dan Cregan

Dear Mr Cregan,

SUBMISSION ON THE PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY

I attach a document which sets out some of my concerns about both the proposal to create Adelaide University by the amalgamation of The University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia, and the process by which this is being progressed.

I am writing from the perspective of a former academic who has worked in 7 Universities around the world, including 33 years at The University of Adelaide, and several years as an Adjunct Professor at the University of South Australia.

I would be grateful if your Committee could consider these comments, made against the headings on its web page. I am happy to discuss these further either in writing or in person, if that would be helpful to your Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy S Miles BDS PhD DSc

Emeritus Professor, The University of Adelaide

SUBMISSION ON THE PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY

TIMOTHY S MILES BDS PHD DSC

EMERITUS PROFESSOR, THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

I will address some of the headings listed under the relevant Parliamentary website, and several other points.

The expected impact (including non-commercially confidential modelling generated by the existing universities) of the new university, on:

- *the South Australian economy and society*

The only official information (or speculation) that we have on the possible economic effects of this merger are carefully-selected extracts from the business case that was prepared by an anonymous consultant: the full document is not available for public comment. There is no valid reason for keeping this business case or its authors confidential: there can be no commercial-in-confidence issues involved, as no other Australian Universities (wisely) are considering merging. It must be concluded that this business case is being kept confidential because it contains information or conclusions that are questionable or ill-founded. Some of the public assertions about promised financial outcomes made in this business case are, to say the least, highly questionable.

Your Committee must insist it be given access not only to the full business case, but also to the *formal and informal* instructions given to the consultants, the data and more importantly the *assumptions* on which it was based. Recent events have, after all, highlighted the questionable probity of several prestigious Australian consultancies (including Deloitte, who are rumoured to have prepared this business case – e.g., The Guardian, July 14, 2023 - *Appendix 2*). Without these details, a business plan is essentially without value.

- *current and future staff and students of the two existing universities, and*

One thing that is quite certain is that the proposed merger will have an adverse affect on the current staff and students of the two existing Universities. The nuts and bolts of this merger will have to be implemented by the academic staff, only 25% of whom support it (The Advertiser June 16, 2023, *Appendix 3*). This will put their core activities (teaching and research) on hold for at least 3-5 years while they go through the convoluted process of completely reorganising their curricula, timetables, research activities, IT, space allocation, internal governance, etc. (*Appendix 1*)

Furthermore, while the VCs state that there will be no “forced redundancies” in the interval following the merger, they neglect to mention that a larger number of academic staff are employed on a casual basis, which means that their employment can be terminated simply by not renewing their short-term contracts.

As for the students, the evidence is overwhelming that the undergraduate experience is greatly reduced in large compared with small Universities. For example, the Head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and former Melbourne University Vice Chancellor, Glyn Davis, strongly advocates a future for smaller universities in order to produce an improved student experience (The Australian, April 13, 2023 - *Appendix 4*).

Professor Høj has predicted that the proposed institution would be ranked within the top 10 in Australia on student experience within 3-5 years. This is completely unsubstantiated fallacy: it is not hard to imagine the student “experience” and quality of interaction with their lecturers in a class of, say, 2,000+ first year Psychology or Biology students. However, more is at stake than the student “experience”: we have been given no information about how an acceptable quality of student teaching and learning will be maintained in a University of 70,000 students.

- *the higher education sector in South Australia.*

Despite the claims made by the government, the impact of the merger will have a number of clear, negative effects.

Firstly, it will by definition reduce the competition between the (currently) three major SA Universities for local and international students and academic staff (the latter are selected on the basis of international excellence).

Secondly, it will reduce the diversity in student choice that currently exists in offerings between the two Universities in many subjects, including for example, in engineering, law and nursing.

Thirdly, it will result in the loss of the state's only world-class (top-100) University (The University of Adelaide's is ranked 89 in the world in 2024 - *Appendix 5*)

- *ensuring Adelaide University's legislative, governance and funding arrangements provide for a university that facilitates access to education by South Australians from a broad range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal South Australians;*

No evidence has been presented (unless it is in the secret business plan) to indicate that there will be improved access to tertiary education in the merged University. I agree that this is important, and of course it can easily be accomplished within the existing Universities.

However, Public Universities Australia (which represents staff and students in Australian public Universities) has stated that “Disadvantaged student groups are not likely to fare better in such an (large) institution” They further contend that mergers between education institutions with the aim of reducing costs have a high risk of prioritising efficiency (as measured by university managers) over effectiveness of teaching (Weekend Australian, August 12, 2023 - *Appendix 6*).

- *is engaged with industry and business in South Australia on research and education outcomes ;*

The Premier and Vice-Chancellors must provide the evidence supporting their claims that the merger will add \$500m to the state's economy annually, educate more than 70,000 students, attract an additional 6,000 international students, and create an additional 1200 jobs by 2034. On the face of it, this is extraordinarily optimistic. It is necessary also to ask whether the modelling that presumably produced these numbers also examined the effect of injecting the government's \$450 million into the existing 3 Universities.

- *generates high quality research and engages in commercialisation of research of strategic importance to South Australia;*

This merger will achieve nothing that could not be achieved by supporting increased collaboration between the staff of the two Universities. Instead, it will leave South Australia as one of only two mainland states without a top-100 world-rated University. This will have the effect of encouraging promising young academics and graduate students to pursue their careers at more esteemed Universities. The University of Adelaide has a proud record across many disciplines in producing persons eminent in their fields. Obvious examples include Dame Roma Mitchell and John Bray in Law, Marcus Oliphant and the Braggs in Science, Howard Florey,

Robin Warren and Frank Fenner in Medicine, and Neil Weste in Engineering. Many of these people have stated that their University of Adelaide education was a factor in their success. Such people do not emerge from regional Universities, for very good reasons.

- *is likely to be consistently highly ranked against universities globally;*

Professor Høj makes the unsubstantiated claim that the merged University would rank inside the top 100 in the global league tables within 3-5 years: “If we do the right thing...we [may] be inside the top 100 from day one”. If there is modelling that shows that the merging of one University currently ranked at world number 88 with another that is ranked in the 300s will result in this new entity entering the top 100, your committee needs to see and analyse it. Professor Høj has repeatedly stated that he knows how to do this: one must then question why he did not achieve a top-100 ranking for UniSA when he was Vice Chancellor from 2007-2012.

As for the Premier's “bigger is better” argument, the largest Group of Eight universities already have an average enrolment that is nearly four times bigger than comparable universities in the UK and nearly twice as large as their US equivalents. There is no statistical analysis that shows that larger Universities are likely to rank more highly: indeed, it is the relatively-small institutions such as Harvard and Oxford Universities who achieve the stellar world rankings, while some huge Australian campuses languish well down the league tables.

- *is attractive to and welcoming of international students; and*

The reasons that international students and their families choose a University are complex. However, it is indisputable that an institution's prestige is vitally important. Whether or not international rankings are a true indication of the quality of an institution, the fact remains that they are a simple metric used by students to help choose their University. In fact, the oft-cited QS S World University Rankings organisation undertakes the ranking exercise specifically to assist students make this choice. Most experts suggest that the merged University would rank somewhere between 180 and 200 in the world: this is comparable with Australian regional Universities which have relatively-poor records in attracting international students.

- *any measures by which the parliament and government can facilitate these outcomes in creating the Adelaide University; and*

The federal government is undertaking a wide-ranging review of the Australian University system – The Accord. This review will be released in December. It is simply madness to rush through the proposed legislation to approve this very questionable merger before the final report and recommendations of The Accord is available.

- *any other related matter.*

There have certainly been no calls from the academic staff (whose collective experience in tertiary education would be measured in thousands of years), students or graduates of the two Universities in support of a merger: quite the opposite in fact, as the merger is opposed by the National Tertiary Education Union, the Adelaide University chapter of the Association of Australian University Professors, Public Universities Australia (representing academic staff and students), and numerous distinguished academics and potential donors to the Universities.

The public deserves to have honest answers to the questions that have been raised here and elsewhere.

They deserve to hear an honest debate on both sides of this argument, and especially to see the evidence on which this merger proposal is based.

They deserve to be told about the very real risk of a failed merger and consequent weakening of the South Australian universities, which has not been given realistic consideration in the rosy and one-sided case for merger we have seen so far from university senior managements and the state government.

Finally, with SA heading towards a \$37 billion state debt, they deserve to be informed why, if the promised expenditure of \$450 million of their money is available, this would not be better spent on e.g., the failing health system, the homelessness crisis, the domestic violence crisis, the inadequate public transport system and the inordinate delays in the criminal justice system.

APPENDIX 1: Implementation-Related Activities

Universities have traditionally been self-governing, in the sense that most important decisions are made by debate and consensus, rather than by the corporate model of top-down *diktat*. So unless the Council of the proposed merged University is prepared simply to dictate all of the changes that need to be made to effect the merger, the academic and professional staff will need to sort out the nuts and bolts of the merger that will determine its success or failure. These include, amongst others:

- Consolidating all course prerequisites, content and value within all degree structures;
- Completely re-creating all course rules so that, e.g., the combined B.A. can include subjects currently offered in only one of the Universities;
- Bringing the content of similar subjects (e.g., in Law) for comparable courses from both Universities into alignment, or developing completely new courses;
- Completely reinventing timetables across multiple campuses;
- Duplicating the teaching of many specific courses (e.g. engineering) while the merger progresses;
- Reorganising the allocation of space for teaching (including lecture hall and laboratory areas for larger classes), as well as for administration and research;
- Integrating the current disparate approaches to administrative activities such as Human Relations (appointments, promotions, tenure), intellectual property rights, contracts, purchasing, etc.);
- Combining the two overarching IT systems (for management, HR, purchasing, finances, course information and learning management systems, etc.);
- Agreeing on a new form of within-institution government; (It will be intriguing to see how the plethora of existing Deputy and Pro Vice Chancellors, Deans and Discipline Heads will agree to give up their powers and generous perks in favour of the corresponding Deans and Heads from the other institution). The expression “bloodbath” springs to mind.....
- Re-organising internal funding arrangements for teaching, administration and research (not a trivial matter!);
- Agreeing on the distribution and reallocation of space for research and teaching (certain to be contentious and disruptive);

The complexity of implementing a merger is no doubt a factor in the failure of attempts elsewhere to merge Universities. There are numerous reports of failed Uni mergers both in Australia and elsewhere. The discarded proposal for mergers in Western Australia is the most recent local example, although an earlier attempt to merge the Australian National University and Canberra CAE (the latter subsequently becoming The University of Canberra) also failed.

It is clear that all academic and administrative staff will be fully occupied in time-consuming discussions for many years in an attempt to bring this merger to an acceptable outcome.

Rather than spend their time debating how to implement a merger, surely it is more important for the academic staff of both Universities to collaborate within their existing structures to develop the new undergraduate and graduate courses and research projects to support the AUKUS submarine project as well as the other urgent environmental and societal challenges that confront us, right now.

The cost of all this merger-related activity by the staff of the two Universities has not been estimated either in staff time or dollars. My own estimate, based on my experience with the much simpler exercise of moving from Discipline-based internal governance to School-based governance within a single institution, is that this will occupy 100-250 hours for each of the approximately 3000 academic staff members, but will be far more for the more senior staff who will do much of the negotiating. This is time that will certainly not be spent on their core duties of teaching and research, nor will it be recognised in applications for promotion or academic posts elsewhere.

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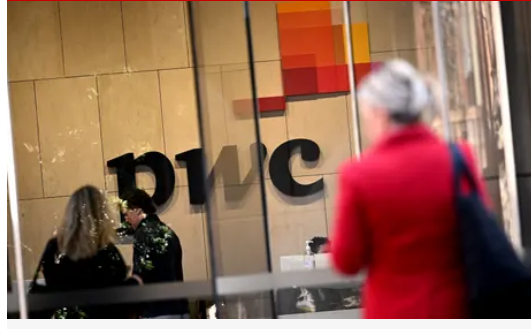
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Consultancy firm Deloitte confirms breach of confidential or proprietary government information on nine additional occasions last financial year, down from 18 a year earlier. Photograph: Parivartan Sharma/Reuters

Another big four consultancy firm has confirmed it misused government information last year, widening a scandal that has engulfed global giant PwC.

Deloitte disclosed the breach as part of an ongoing Senate inquiry, but has so far refused to provide any more details about the incident due to client confidentiality.

The firm has also detailed how it was dumped by the Home Affairs department after it failed to disclose a conflict of interest. A similar breach was also identified while working with the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO).

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PwC's misuse of confidential tax policy information has triggered a reputation crisis, multiple sackings and parliamentary inquiries, referrals to police and the new National Anti-Corruption Commission, and the divestment of its government services division for just \$1.

Deloitte declined to comment when contacted by Guardian Australia about the misuse of government information, but told the Senate inquiry it takes its obligations seriously.

“Any matters in relation to the misuse of confidential government information would be investigated in line with our normal processes,” said Deloitte’s response to questions from the committee.

“Consequences would vary depending on the findings of our internal investigations and, as with any misconduct, these consequences include disciplinary actions in accordance with our policies, which apply to both partners and employees.”

Greens senator Barbara Pocock said the disclosure confirmed the “misuse of government information by consultants goes beyond the PwC tax scandal”.

“It has always been a central concern of mine that what we are seeing is just the tip of the iceberg.”

Dr Andy Schmulow, an associate professor of law at the University of Wollongong, said the disclosures highlighted industry-wide structural issues needed to be addressed.

“I have absolutely no doubt that this is not contained to PwC,” Schmulow said. “What this demonstrates is that the system itself is so dysfunctional ... that it is no longer possible, even in theory, to uphold the public good.”

Deloitte also confirmed the misuse of confidential or proprietary information on nine additional occasions last financial year, down from 18 a year earlier. Details of these instances were not provided to the Senate and may lead to further investigations.

Deloitte did provide details on two conflict of interest breaches involving government contracts.

Last year, Deloitte was contracted by the ANAO to audit a government agency’s environment, social and governance data. At the same time, Deloitte was engaged by that same agency to audit its financial statements.

“It was identified in August 2022 that Deloitte had not sought pre-approval from the ANAO to provide the service, as required under their independence and conflicts management policies,” Deloitte’s response to the Senate said.

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Deloitte also referred to the Home Affairs department terminating a contract after an investigation found “an organisational conflict of interest that was not disclosed to the department when it was engaged”.

According to an ANAO report published last month, Deloitte was advising the department on IT procurement. At the same time, a Deloitte partner was seconded to a company bidding for work with the department.

“At the time of its engagement ... Deloitte had an actual conflict of interest and the failure to declare this interest was a breach of the probity plan,” the ANAO report said.

Deloitte told the Senate it was “not aware of any other significant conflict of interest matters relating to government work”.

Deloitte also declined to provide the Senate with details on how its partnership is structured. PwC supplied a copy of its partnership agreement, but requested it not be shared beyond committee members.

“The partnership agreement between the partners of Deloitte is a confidential and commercially sensitive document,” Deloitte’s response said.

“It contains sensitive information that could potentially present a commercial advantage to our competitors and prejudice our partnership.”

Earlier this week, PwC admitted to another serious conflict of interest breach but has clarified that it did not involve the misuse of government information.

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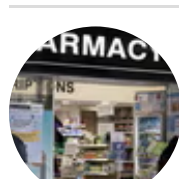
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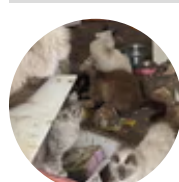
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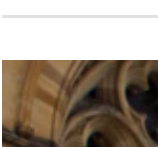
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South Australia Education

National Tertiary Education Union SA branch survey finds only one in four staff support uni merger

As a decision looms on merging two of Adelaide's universities, a new survey reveals what staff really think about the plan.

Lauren Novak

Social Policy Editor

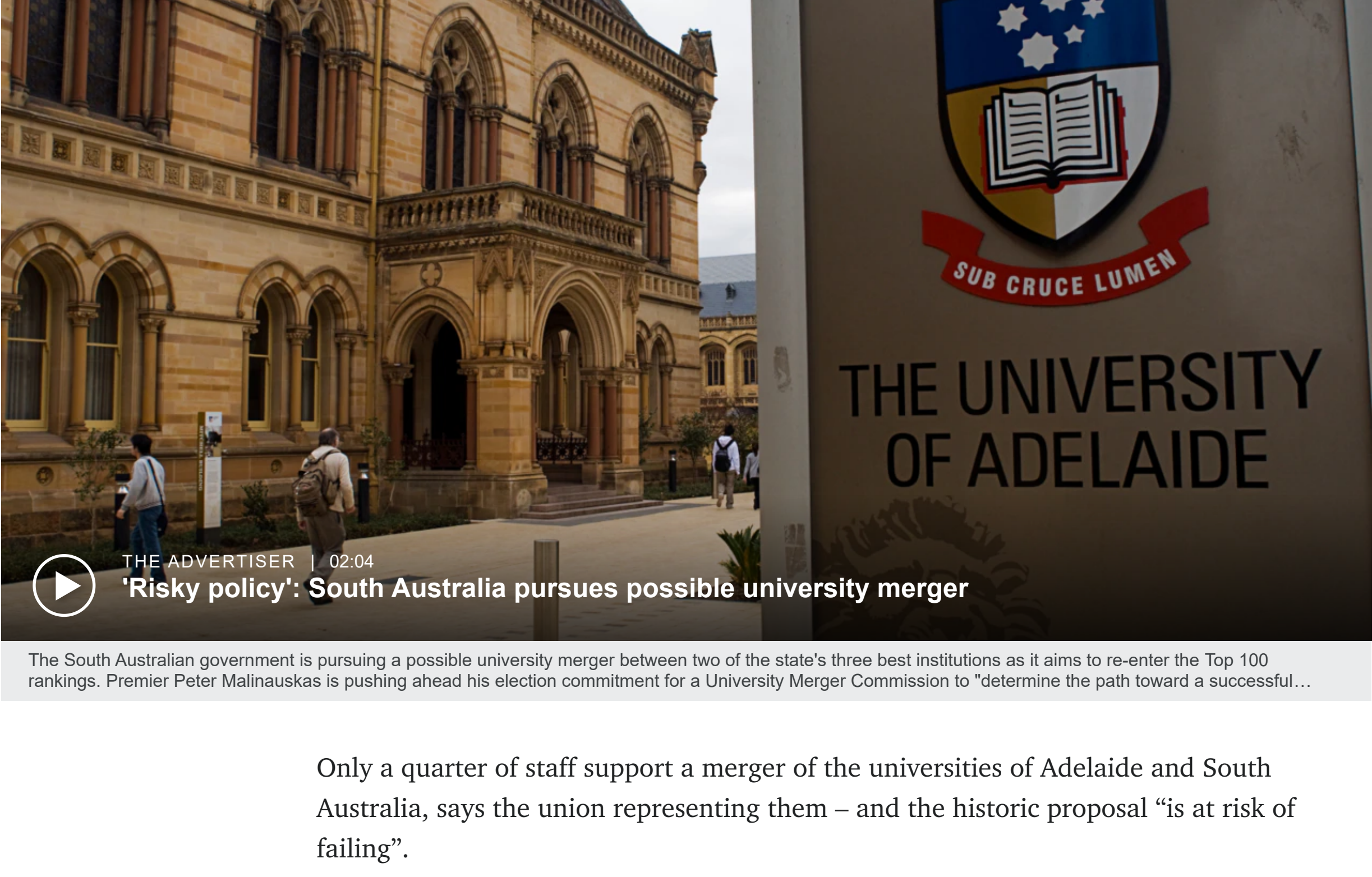
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June 16, 2023 - 3:50PM

The Advertiser



Only a quarter of staff support a merger of the universities of Adelaide and South Australia, says the union representing them – and the historic proposal “is at risk of failing”.

It comes as leaders of the universities confirm a decision by their governing councils on whether to “support the creation of a new university” is expected within weeks.

About 1100 staff from UniSA, the University of Adelaide and Flinders University responded to a survey by the National Tertiary Education Union SA branch.

The results, released on Friday, showed only one in four respondents supported [the merger, which was proposed six months ago](#).

Only one in five respondents were confident that combining the University of Adelaide and UniSA would result in better education and less than one-third felt it would foster better research.

NTEU SA division secretary Andrew Miller has written to Premier Peter Malinauskas and Deputy Premier Susan Close, the minister responsible for higher education, warning “the entire process is at risk of failing” and university staff want more consultation.

“Getting this wrong would be catastrophic for SA,” Dr Miller said.

“There is no turning back once this decision is made. We must get it right. Staff are demanding concrete evidence the merger will deliver better quality education and better-quality research.”



Adelaide University North Terrace campus. NCA NewsWire / Kelly Barnes



UniSA City West campus. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Kelly Barnes

It was revealed in December that leaders of the University of Adelaide and UniSA had signed a statement of co-operation to pursue a merger with no net job losses.

It was proposed that the combined institution be known as Adelaide University and begin operating from January 2026.

[Flinders University has opted not to take part in merger talks](#).

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In a joint statement, University of Adelaide Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Hoj and UniSA Vice Chancellor Professor David Lloyd said both university councils were “working through a comprehensive set of feasibility documentation, which outlines the benefits, opportunities and risks of combining ... to create a new university”.

“This has been informed by feedback received during this period from staff and students, together with the broader South Australian community,” they said.

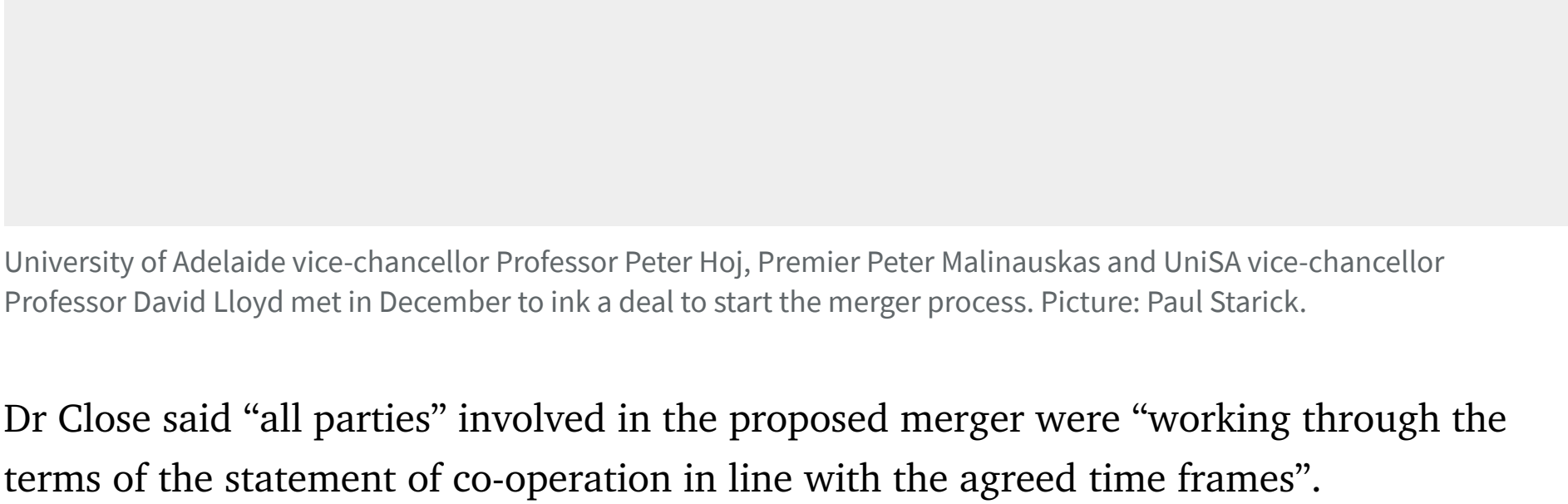
“After reviewing this information independently, council members will consider whether to support the creation of a new university. This will take place within weeks, and we will share the outcome at that time. No decision has been made at this point.”

In the latest University of Adelaide annual report Professor Hoj had said the feasibility study and business case were due to be completed by the end of June.

Asked about the merger earlier this month Mr Malinauskas said the two universities involved had been “working cooperatively with the state government”.

“We said that we were aiming (for a decision) towards the middle of the year, we believe we’re on that track with that,” he said.

Mr Malinauskas has said the state government will make a “significant” financial contribution to the new university but has not specified how much.



University of Adelaide vice-chancellor Professor Peter Hoj, Premier Peter Malinauskas and UniSA vice-chancellor Professor David Lloyd met in December to ink a deal to start the merger process. Picture: Paul Starick.

Dr Close said “all parties” involved in the proposed merger were “working through the terms of the statement of co-operation in line with the agreed time frames”.

“Should the new university proceed, it would require legislation, and consultation would be undertaken as part of that process,” she said.

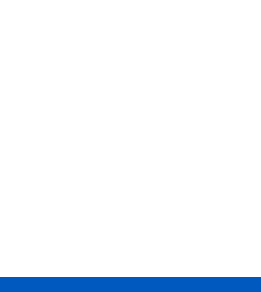
Opposition education spokesman John Gardner said the government had “completely botched” the merger consultation process and “lost the confidence of staff and community at the universities”.

He said an Opposition survey of almost 2000 people had revealed 41 per cent supported the merger but less than a quarter would back a taxpayer-funded contribution of more than \$10m.

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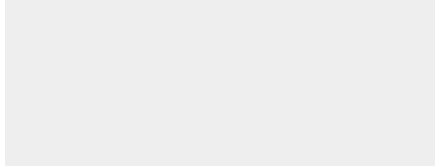
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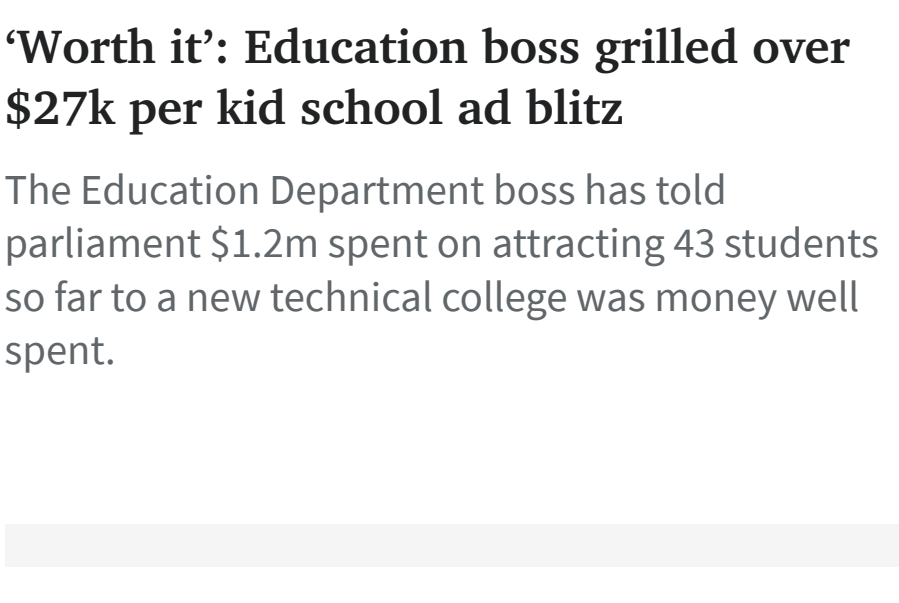
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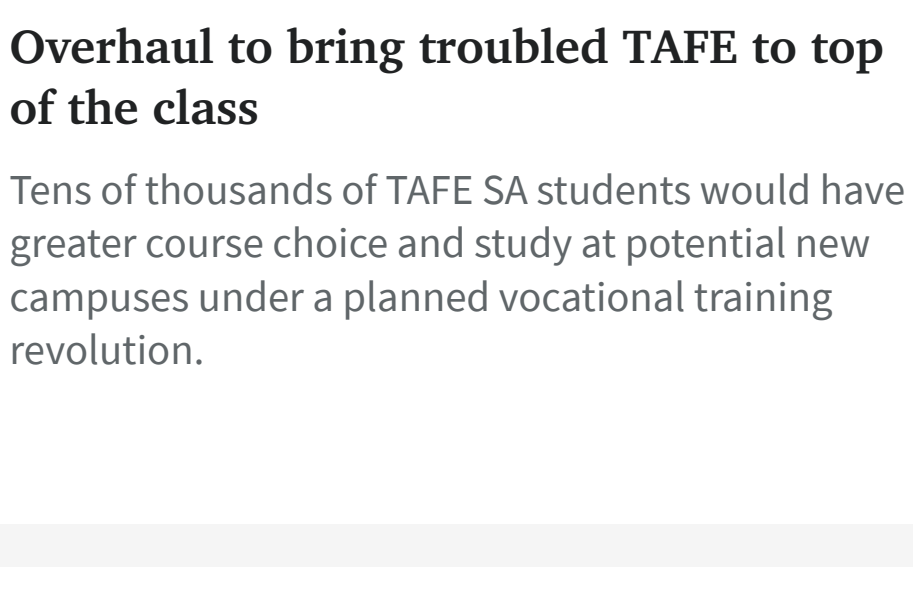
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The Education Minister said the government had “completely botched” the merger consultation process and “lost the confidence of staff and community at the universities”.



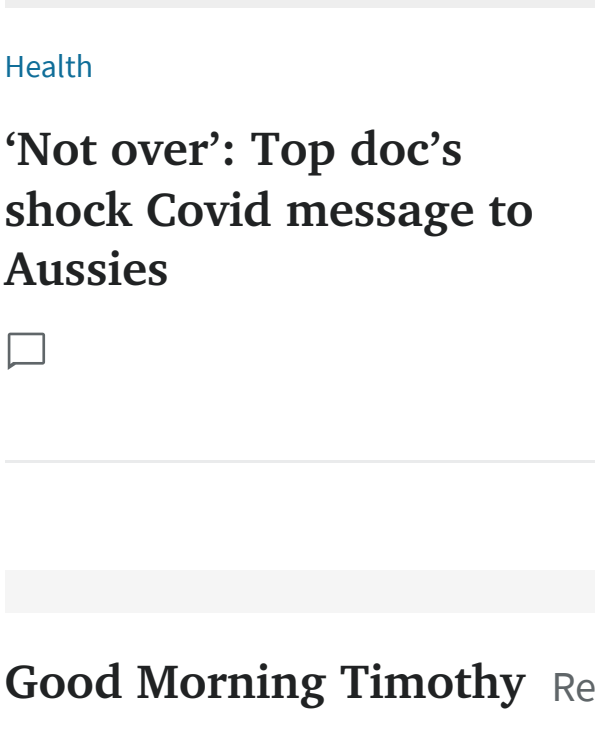
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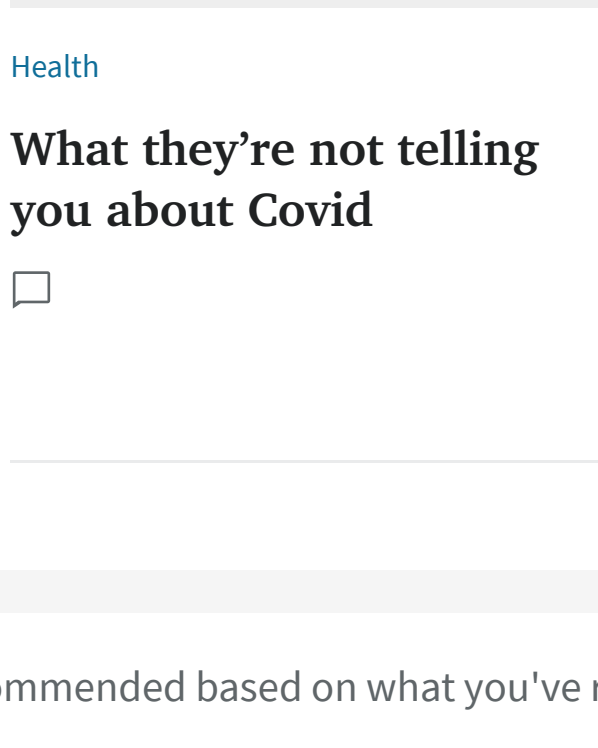
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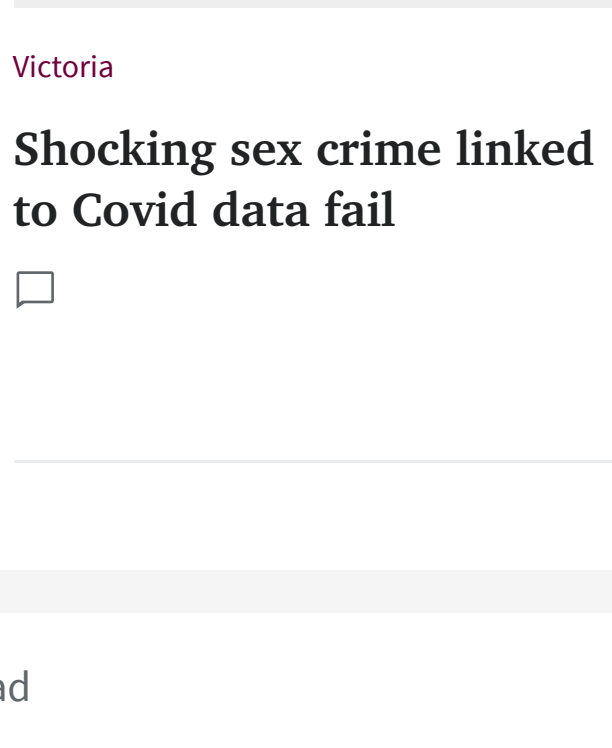
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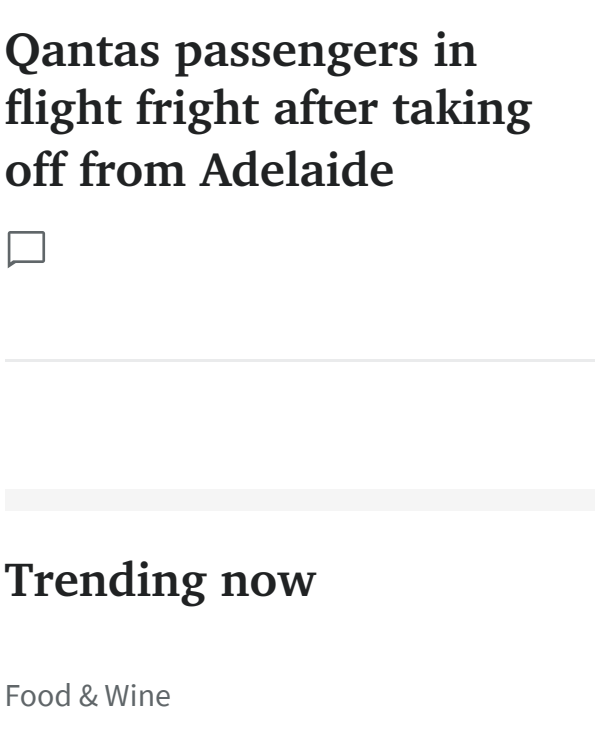


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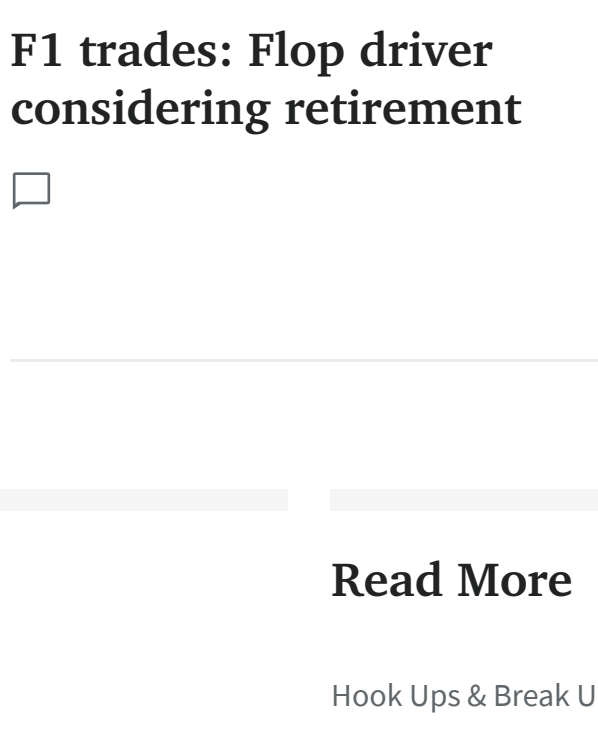
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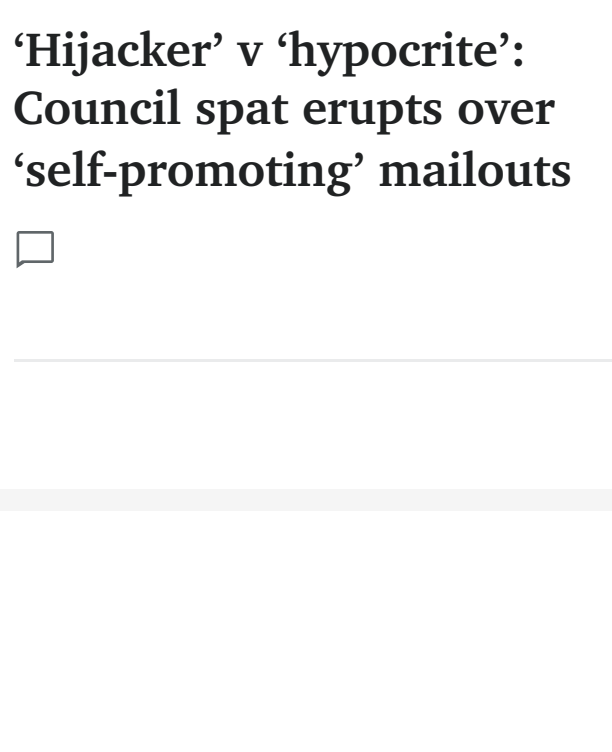
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PM's Department chief Glyn Davis challenges higher education policy

By **TIM DODD**
HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR

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3:20PM APRIL 13, 2023
29 COMMENTS



Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet secretary Glyn Davis. Picture: Aaron Francis

The nation's most powerful bureaucrat has challenged the long-term direction of Commonwealth higher education policy which led to Australian universities being very large by world standards, highly reliant on international students for revenue and facing growing financial risk.

In a new essay, Prime Minister and Cabinet Department secretary Glyn Davis says that through steady reduction of public funding, a succession of federal governments "has deeded the nation a university sector that relies heavily on the families of Asia".

The risks inherent in this approach was exposed by the pandemic, writes Professor Davis, who was vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne from 2005 to 2018.

"Many universities now face serious debt, further research funding cuts and, in time, falling global rankings. We are yet to see a public university go bankrupt in Australia, but the possibility looms," he writes in the essay published in a new book, Australian Universities: A Conversation about Public Good, from Sydney University Press.

Professor Davis reserves a special barb for Scott Morrison for his call, while prime minister, for universities to "consider their economic model" when faced with the loss of international students during the pandemic. He says there is no alternative model available to universities under current funding and regulatory policy.

"Mr Morrison's injunction was not a meaningful insight about choice, but government deflecting blame about the consequences of its decisions," he writes.

Professor Davis's views will be critical in shaping the Albanese government's plans for higher education reform, with the first report from a review panel due in June.

In the essay he cites figures showing that the five largest Group of Eight universities have an average enrolment of 64,328 students, nearly four times bigger than comparable universities in the UK and nearly twice as large as their US equivalents.

He also says government policy, particularly rules which require Australian universities to do research, have stopped Australia from having more diverse universities, such as the teaching-only universities in the US and Canada.

Professor Davis's warnings about the scale of universities comes as two institutions – the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia – are moving toward a merger which they say will be justified by the larger size of the new university which results.

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In the essay, Professor Davis says the sheer size of Australian universities could make them too unwieldy to react quickly to digital disruption of the traditional education model.

"In a large organisation, management attention is stretched and enmeshed. Time to react is limited," he writes. "New ways of working require investment. Just as an ecosystem dominated by one species is vulnerable to sudden environmental change, so a challenge from new technology will affect the entire Australian tertiary system in similar ways.

"A system with more varied institutions, some large and others small, some comprehensive and others specialist, commuter or residential, may have more scope for experimentation and rapid evolution."

Professor Davis argues that large universities in Australia were the inevitable result of government decisions, dating from the 1990s. In order to save money, population growth was absorbed into existing universities, and the requirement for universities to conduct research also meant that more students – particularly more international students – were necessary to pay for it.

He says in the essay that Australia's large universities have come as a cost.

"For those working in higher education, larger institutions require huge buildings on an often crowded campus, detailed reporting requirements, and management of large classes. The common complaint across the contemporary university is little time for quality teaching, research or providing support to students".

But Professor Davis writes in the essay that changes can be made.

"This could be a moment of innovation – a time for new institutions that take advantage of pedagogical technologies to widen participation, a chance to experiment with graduate apprenticeships, trial novel aggregations of disciplines, teach in multiple languages, pursue knowledge of institutional governance," he says.

"We can learn from the success of online learning during the pandemic, and encourage ranking systems which do more than measure research but place at least equal value on teaching quality."

TIM DODD, HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR

Tim Dodd is The Australian's higher education editor. He has over 25 years experience as a journalist covering a wide variety of areas in public policy, economics, politics and foreign policy, including reporting [L](#). [Read more](#)



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Public Universities Australia says SA uni merger ‘offers no benefit’

By **TIM DODD**
HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR
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7:17PM JUNE 13, 2023
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From left: University of Adelaide vice-chancellor Peter Hoj, SA Premier Peter Malinauskas and University of South Australia vice-chancellor David Lloyd in a meeting to discuss the university merger. Photo: Paul Starick

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A key alliance representing academics and students is opposing the merger of South Australia's two largest universities, warning that it is not in the public interest.

Public Universities Australia, a group backed by academic and student groups, the National Tertiary Education Union and many individual academics, said in a statement this week that the proposed merger of the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia “is likely to produce an extremely large institution in which academic standards are further eroded and students are less satisfied”.

“Disadvantaged student groups are not likely to fare better in such an institution,” the PUA said.

The group said that mergers between education institutions with the aim of reducing costs had a high risk of prioritising efficiency (as measured by university managers) over effectiveness of teaching.

It said that students and teaching were generally viewed in Australia's higher education system “as an exploitable source of revenue through which to subsidise inadequately funded research”.

“There is no indication that this structural antagonism between research and teaching will change with the proposed merger; instead it continues policies that have steadily eroded Australia's sovereign capabilities that critically rely on the quality of both teaching and research,” PUA said.

The SA university merger has been strongly backed by state Premier Peter Malinauskas.

The two universities are currently working on a business plan – due to be completed soon – which will inform the decision of the both institutions' governing bodies on whether to proceed with the merger.

PUA added that it did not rule out supporting any South Australian university merger, or some other from of cross-institutional collaboration in the state, if it was “designed to strengthen academic standards, student learning, teaching, and the nexus between research and teaching”.

TIM DODD, HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR

Tim Dodd is The Australian's higher education editor. He has over 25 years experience as a journalist covering a wide variety of areas in public policy, economics, politics and foreign policy, including reporting f... [Read more](#)



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