

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Provisions of the Higher Education Legislation Amendment Bill (No.3) 2004

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Mr John Carter
Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2601



23 August 2004.

Dear Mr Carter

**EWRE committee Inquiry – Provisions of the Higher Education Legislation
Amendment Bill (No. 3) 2004.**

The Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies is the peak representative body of 60,000 Australian Scientists and Technologists.

FASTS believes most of the proposed amendments in HELAB (3) are straightforward and essentially administrative in nature.

FASTS would, however, like to make some comment on item 1 of schedule 1 of the legislation that amends the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* by adding Melbourne University Private to Table B of higher education providers.

Placing an institution on Table B allows it access to a number of Commonwealth programs for teaching and research including the Institutional Grants Scheme and the Research Training Scheme.

In addition, the ARC funding guidelines for key programs such as Discovery-project and Linkage-project specify that the Chief Investigator of a funding application must come from an institution listed on table A or Table B (Discovery-project also permit applications from museums or herbaria).

FASTS have an in principle concern with diluting public funding for higher education research or permitting institutions that are not accredited universities to offer research training (although there are good reasons for encouraging collaboration between universities, industry and not-for profit research bodies in research training)

FASTS has no position on the academic merits of Melbourne University Private. We note that it is a wholly owned commercial subsidiary of Melbourne University and has close connections with Melbourne University including connections with its academic staff.

In terms of governance, Melbourne University Private differs from all other institutions on Table A and Table B:

- it is not established by State or Commonwealth legislation;
- its status as an education provider under the *Victorian Tertiary Education Act 1993* is only provisional for five years and it must meet a range of conditions if it is to be accredited beyond that time frame; and
- it is a commercial 'for profit' institution (the other two private universities in Australia - Bond and Notre Dame – are 'not-for-profit' institutions).

FASTS believes a critical feature of public funding of research is the notion of 'public interest' (as distinct from purely private, commercial interest). Accordingly, the concept of 'not-for-profit' is non-trivial in this context when it is connected to the principle that institutions in receipt of public funding for research and research training are understood as acting in the public interest (this is specified, for instance, in the enabling legislation of Bond University).

FASTS are not aware of any compelling case that placing Melbourne University Private on Table B adds to the public interest.

We believe that the Senate inquiry should satisfy itself that such a case has, in fact, been made.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Smith
Executive Director