

The Australia Institute Ltd

Submission no. 2: Full fee-paying students and standards

**Submission to the Senate Employment,  
Workplace Relations, Small Business and  
Education References Committee**

*Inquiry into the capacity of public  
universities to meet Australia's higher  
education needs*

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Contact: The Australia Institute  
Garden Wing, University House,  
ANU ACT 0200  
(02) 6249 6221 [mail@tai.org.au](mailto:mail@tai.org.au)

## 1. Introduction

In mid-2000, the Australia Institute commissioned a research project to investigate perceptions of social science academics about the state of academic freedom.<sup>1</sup> Anecdotal evidence had suggested that there is growing concern about the effects of commercialisation of higher education on academic freedom.

As systematic research into this question is very limited, the Australia Institute study was exploratory in nature. The social sciences were selected for study as it was felt that the issues affecting the physical and other sciences are different, and worthy of separate study.

Social scientists from thirteen Australian universities were sent a questionnaire that sought quantitative and qualitative data on perceptions of academic freedom and the possible influence of commercialisation. Follow-up interviews with selected respondents were also conducted.

Early in 2001, preliminary results of the study received extensive media attention. The media attention focussed on one aspect of the results, the issue of preference for full fee-paying students (FFPS). The study did not specifically set out to investigate the issue of FFPS. However, two questions included items that related to some extent to the issue of student standards and fee-paying students. One question asking respondents about their levels of satisfaction with various aspects of academic freedom included an item about the freedom to determine student standards. Another question asked respondents whether, among several other issues, they were concerned about the priority given to courses that attract full fee-paying students. Respondents were then asked to elaborate on the experiences mentioned, and a number reported on issues related to full fee-paying students. Unsolicited responses about FFPS also featured in other open-ended questions. A number of interviewees also volunteered perspectives on FFPS.

It should be noted that, with the exception of commerce and economics, the disciplines covered by the Institute survey tend not to be ones that attract large numbers of full fee-paying students. Claims of preferential treatment for FFPS are likely to be more extensive in areas other than the social sciences.

This document reports the comments of survey respondents and interviewees on the issue of full fee-paying students. It is important that individual instances of 'soft marking' be placed in the broader context of current funding arrangements in Australian higher education. This submission should therefore be read in conjunction with the Institute's full report.

In addition to reporting on the results of the Institute's study, the Appendix to this submission contains a collection of claims of preference for full fee-paying students that

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<sup>1</sup> Kayrooz, C., Kinnear, P., Preston, P. 2001 *Academic Freedom and Commercialisation in Australian universities: perceptions and experiences of social scientists*, Discussion Paper No. 37, The Australia Institute, Canberra

are in the public or semi-public domain. We have restricted the list to those claims that appear to have been made by academics. However, since most of them are anonymous it is not possible to vouch for their veracity.

## **2. Survey responses relating to the issue of fee paying students**

Although the study did not specifically set out to investigate the issue of FFPS, several opportunities were available to respondents to comment on the issue. As mentioned above, two questions included items that related to the issue of student standards and FFPS. These questions and the results relating to FFPS are reproduced below. The first question read:

*Q. 12 Below are some commonly identified aspects of academic freedom. In the left column, please rate each of these in terms of their importance to you. In the right column, please rate each of these in terms of your satisfaction with them.*

Among the aspects listed was: 'Freedom to determine student standards'. Seventy-five per cent of respondents rated this aspect 'high' in importance. Only 28 per cent indicated that their level of satisfaction is high, with 42 per cent saying they are moderately satisfied and 27 per cent rating their satisfaction as low. This aspect attracted the greatest proportion of 'low satisfaction' responses and the smallest proportion of 'high satisfaction' responses (28%) among those listed.

Respondents were also asked:

*Q. 15 Below are some experiences that may be associated with commercialisation of Australian universities. Please identify the extent to which they have applied to you.*

The items included one that read 'Valuing courses that attract full fee-paying students over other courses within your university'. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced, to some degree, a valuing of courses that attract FFPS over other courses. Fifty per cent reported that they had experienced this to a major extent, placing this item amongst the top five items experienced to a 'major extent'. As the comments in the following section demonstrate, many respondents perceive this to be a negative development because it reduces the opportunity to teach subjects that they consider to be important, as well as tending to restrict university teaching to relatively 'safe' and vocationally oriented subjects. Nevertheless, the issue of how universities distribute resources in order to respond to student demand is a highly complex issue.

Directly following this question, respondents were asked to elaborate on any of the experiences they had identified, or others that had not been identified. In doing so, a number reported on issues related to full fee-paying students. Similar reports were also provided at other places throughout the questionnaire, mainly in response to an open-ended question asking respondents to reflect on their level of satisfaction with academic freedom and in response to a question asking whether there was anything else that they would like to add.

The study also conducted a series of semi-structured follow-up interviews with selected questionnaire respondents in order to explore a range of issues further. While respondents were not asked specifically about FFPS, a number raised concerns about the issue in response to other questions. In all, 31 respondents (19% of the total sample) raised the issue of FFPS through unsolicited comments in open-ended and interview responses. The types of concerns raised fell into the categories listed in Table 1.

**Table 1 Types of concerns related to FFPS**

<b>Type of concern</b>	<b>Number*</b>
Statements relating to pressure to alter grades for FFPS	15**
Valuing courses that attract FFPS over other courses	12
Concern about general lowering of standards due to the need to attract and retain FFPS	6
Concern about the absence of increased resources to cope with increased numbers of FFPS	4
Concern about putting effort into FFPS at expense of other students	3
Unconcerned or positive about FFPS	2

\* Column adds up to more than 31 because some respondents expressed more than one type of concern.

\*\*This includes four who made specific reports of instances of pressure to pass FFPS.

Fifteen of the 31 who mentioned issues relating to FFPS reported various types of pressure – direct or indirect – to grade FFPS in a preferential manner. Just over one-third (12) reported that they had experienced a valuing of courses that attract FFPS over other courses. Other issues to emerge included general concern about a reduction of standards due to an increase in FFPS, concern that resources were not sufficient to meet the demands of extra FFPS and concern about too much emphasis on FFPS to the detriment of other students. Two respondents said that they were unconcerned about FFPS or viewed the development in a positive light.

The following section provides quotations or comments from survey responses and interview notes that demonstrate the types of responses collected in these categories. Some comments have been modified to protect the identities of the respondents, but the comments are otherwise reported as recorded. Some have not been included as it is not possible to do so in a way that would guarantee protection of the respondents' identities. Gender references are made neutral by referring to the respondent as him/her, his/her or s/he.

### 3. Comments and quotations about FFPS

#### a) *Claims of pressure to alter grades for FFPS*

##### From open-ended questionnaire items:

1. 'As course coordinator of a fee paying course, there have been instances when the bar has been lowered to allow a substandard applicant into the course. I have been asked/directed to reconsider an application which I have declined which I found extremely distressing. Especially when after a semester the student dropped out anyway because s/he can't cope with the academic requirements of the course.'
2. 'I have been under some pressure in the past to pass students who are international full fee paying students even when I had clear evidence of their plagiarism in an assignment.'
3. 'Whilst I recognise the rights of students, in recent times this has been promoted over my professional judgement of their achievement, and I have felt pushed into passing students who in my opinion should not pass. A serious implication in my area is that students are sent to work with the public therefore our duty of care to the public via who we send out to work with them is compromised by students' rights to education - regardless of the consequences for the public.'
4. '[there are] implicit pressures to pass students in fee paying postgraduate coursework programs. These come not from the University but from the circumstances of international students or local part-time students.'
5. [Academic freedom means...] '... the freedom to report honestly your research findings...to undertake research without pressure to find the answers sought by the funding organization [and] not feeling pressured to pass students because they are full fee paying.... The push for commercialisation, particularly in the form of fee paying students ... is probably the area where I often feel confronted – when students make mention that they are full fee paying or even that they are now paying HECS.'
6. 'Fairly satisfied with my current university...Less satisfied with my previous university where commercial pressures were eroding academic standards, particularly in relation to treatment and grading of full-fee paying international students. Trend towards grade inflation, difficulty of 'holding the line' in relation to admission policies and degree requirements for graduation.'
7. 'Students who pay fees expect not only to pass but [get] high grades. This is timidity on the part of several lecturers in the university, not the university itself. Otherwise [the university] is fine in my opinion and the decision whether or not to stand up to intimidatory tactics by fee paying students is made by individual lecturers. Unfortunately too many have given up the battle.'

8. 'Assessment of undergraduate and postgraduate students is grossly affected by requirements to maintain retention rates, especially, but not exclusively, of full-fee-paying students. Students with very little English comprehension must be awarded passes in subjects of which they understand very little, if anything. Pass marks are absurdly low, while high grades are the rule rather than the exception.'
9. '[My university] focuses on International full fee paying students to the detriment of our HECS students. There is a huge ethical compromise going on here where students are allowed to enrol in courses without sufficient English, then lecturers are pushed to pass them.'
10. 'I am too new to comment clearly on this. I feel the pressure to have fee paying students and to have large classes but I am still learning about the culture and structure of the university. I have worked for years as a casual and a part time teacher but this year is the first insight I have had to the pressure the university is under to survive under government cut backs'

**From interview notes<sup>2</sup>:**

11. [According to this respondent] the prime example of commercialisation is the trend towards more full fee paying students. [The university] has [a very high number of FFPS] and this mainly consists of overseas students. The [respondent felt that] there is direct pressure on academics to pass and even give outstanding marks to these students. [Coordinators of some subjects] exert pressure to lower standards to achieve this outcome. .... [some] took papers that were given poor marks and remarked those papers to give higher marks. [The respondent thought that this was] a direct influence of commercialisation. Another detrimental effect is on subjects that have predominantly HECS students where tutors and lecturers are less available to them than to overseas students. [This respondent thought] that the 'creeping evil' of full fee paying students means that academics have no freedom to relate to and assess students properly in the development of their subjects and in focusing on quality rather than outcomes.
12. [This respondent felt that] academics should be responsible to their students for providing the best teaching and learning outcomes by being up to date and adaptable to their needs. Responsibility is also to the organisation or school in terms of regulations and ethics requirements. [However, this respondent felt that] the marketing policies are putting pressure on academics to pass overseas students but thus far s/he is holding to his/her standards.
13. [This respondent felt that a] major constraint [on academic freedom] is the targeting of the full fee paying student market both locally and internationally at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Management increasingly values full fee paying students over HECS paying students. [Where once there was a limit

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<sup>2</sup> Interviews were not transcribed due to limited funds. However, detailed notes were taken by the interviewer and a written record was produced as soon as possible following the interview. The comments provided in this section are taken from the written record.

on the proportion of FFPS, this is no longer the case and the respondent felt that this has resulted in] a watering down of the content of courses and the standard of courses. Some courses are offered at different levels of content and [given a specific designation to denote that they are specifically adapted for overseas students]. A complicated special consideration system has been developed to cater for the demands of full fee paying students. The rules have been changed so that students can receive a pass with a mark of [a percentage below 50%]. [The respondent felt that] this is an erosion of standards.

14. [This respondent indicated that s/he] has not yet experienced institutional pressure to comply with commercial or external agendas of funding agencies but feels that ... there is pressure to remark or re-look at students' work. S/he knows that some of his/her colleagues have complied with this pressure. The trend towards fees for services, particularly with overseas full fee paying students is a potential problem. Pressure to pass students is particularly strong from [a particular country].
15. [This respondent] gave an example where the mark for an Honours candidate was changed by the administration. The piece of work was resubmitted. [The respondent felt that] this was an absolute violation of academic standards. The biggest threat is where the administration system is imposed on to academic standards. There is an ideological dilemma between the customer service obligation of a commercialised environment and the values of an academic environment. The respondent asked whether students have "an entitlement to pass"?

#### ***b) Valuing of courses to attract FFPS over other courses***

##### **From open-ended questionnaire items:**

1. 'I see the [pressures] as stemming from the institution's economic viability and the competitive climate ... in conservative and economically stricken times. So, it is valuing of courses that attract students, valuing of full fee paying students, valuing of students from departments that are more commercially centred and central along with a huge emphasis on industry links, chasing large ARC grants in areas tangential to expertise, emphasis on funded research over unfunded, competition and erosion of universities as a place to think, argue, debate.'
2. 'The focus now is on attracting external funding for research and full fee paying students. This focus determines which courses survive, what subjects are taught, who is promoted or retrenched and so on. It seems obvious to me that universities are following the market not leading it. In the longer term, it will not only affect academic freedom but also universities as a source of innovation must suffer.'
3. 'Over the last year there has been more emphasis on providing courses that attract full fee paying students...'

4. 'There are definite problems if you work in an area that doesn't attract industry funds or high fee paying students.'
5. 'Commercialisation is the pressure being placed on academics to bring in money. For the individual academic this influences the direction of research as the research is adapted to attract outside funding. It is also the pressure to attract full fee paying students. This influences academic teaching.'
6. 'The effects of commercialisation are felt mainly in the growth of fee for service courses that are promoting a market for education. These are non-funded courses. They are sponsored by non-university sources/consultancies/ projects. Such activities are promoted by the faculty's commercial arm... In this environment traditional academic values are under attack. The only standard of value seems to be 'does it pay its way'. This extends to the very naming of courses that are focussed on attracting students. The name attracts the market. This is purely pragmatic in terms of 'fee for service' provided. The content of the course is utilitarian and as such is vocationally oriented.'
7. 'The need to attract large number of students and the need to attract fee paying students are starting to influence my research and my teaching. It is becoming a major constraint to my ability to pursue research that I find important.'
8. 'It's a battle to keep the head above water in these times...courses do have to fight each other in terms of numbers...and you do juggle between running a subject that is great – for the few – against a more generic subject.'
9. 'My recent experience (past 18 months) is that I have been encouraged to coordinate and teach in a huge undergraduate subject which is being increasingly pressured to modify its intellectual edge in order to make it accessible to full fee-paying overseas students.'

**From interview notes:**

10. [The respondent felt that] Arts are funded differently to IT and have less overseas students. Arts departments find it hard work to maintain their funding levels. They have less overseas students to prop up funding levels.
11. [This respondent raised] two specific issues ...as central to the effects of commercialisation on academic freedom. These were the increasing influence of industry and the pressure to attract full fee paying students, particularly overseas students. The example was given of a joint project between [university] and [company] to train [company staff]... It involved a lot of money and there was concern that this was a 'dodgy' concept that was essentially [the company] paying for their staff members to obtain a piece of paper from a university. The question of what would happen when a student was failed when a company was paying for a 'good' was not resolved before the project fell through. The example of

[another university] and [another company] was raised in this context. There is increasing pressure to gain sponsorship from industry and business for courses, individuals and research.

12. [This respondent felt that] the university has experienced a constant push for off-shore courses. As academics they are being encouraged to produce what can be bought. His/her department is not very 'sexy' in these terms. The IT and Business areas are more suited to this environment. He/she is concerned that there is no critical analysis of the appropriate place and role of different departments in this environment. The only method of evaluation seems to be the ability to generate revenue.

### ***c) General lowering of academic standards due to FFPS***

#### **From open-ended questionnaire items:**

1. 'The pressure to bring in external research funding has increased enormously in the past five years or so. There has also been an increase in pressure to undertake consulting, though more in other departments and institutions than mine. I am not averse in principle to the increase in FFP students, particularly from overseas. In my view, however, there has been a deterioration in standards as a result.'
2. 'Fee paying students and concern about CEQ scores and the standing of the university in competition with other universities all makes for a situation where the freedom to assess students' work becomes contained within 'politically correct' guidelines. New guidelines about student's rights seem to be negotiated outside of any consideration of lecturers' rights and responsibilities about maintaining standards.'
3. [other concerns include the]... 'lowering of academic standards in order to encourage fee paying students, esp. overseas students.'

#### **From interview notes:**

4. A narrow definition of commercialisation includes universities gaining revenue external to government grants, from full fee paying students and consultancies. A point to note is that no measurement exercise has yet to be undertaken to test whether standards have been lowered as a result. Such a measure would include an examination of the failure rate and the adaptations made to these new students.
5. The [respondent's department] is ... caught in a bind. They teach a number of full fee paying post-graduates in [a certain subject area] on a full cost recovery basis. However they have to return [a small, but significant proportion] of this income to the Faculty and [a higher proportion] of government income to the Faculty. This ... is not only a disincentive to gaining external funding but is a

disincentive to fearless research, public commentary and teaching... This financial strategy affects academic integrity and the relationships with funding bodies. There are a number of serious consequences following from these restrictions on social inquiry and academic comment. Australian higher education is fast becoming provincial, with second rate institutions.

6. Concern about the loss of academic standards has not reached a high level as yet at [own university] but there is concern at [one part of the university with specialised industry training]. The controversy over academic standards relates to the effect on the careers of students who do not pass a required course. A special kind of pass may be introduced that in any other circumstances would be considered a failure

***d) Concern that resources are not provided to meet the demands of increasing FFPS***

**From open ended questionnaire items:**

1. 'Currently I run a unit that attracts the majority of full-fee paying overseas students and although the large number of students and the funds they bring are on the surface welcomed there has been no on-going staff appointments in the field to support the teaching of the unit – apart from myself these full-fee paying students are therefore taught by casual/part-time staff – which is even cheaper to run – however, quality becomes a real concern in the long term!'
2. 'I am disillusioned by the fact that the university is more interested in attracting overseas full-fee paying students but unwilling to invest on upgrading the necessary infrastructure (such as hiring more competent staff members and providing better computer facilities) for these students.'
3. '... the need to allocate more time for teaching, administration and applying for grants along with efforts at restructuring to save costs is affecting staff morale. To cope adequately with all the demands – administration, teaching, preparing new masters units for fee paying students, flexible delivery of courses, improving research productivity, means long working hours six days and even sometimes seven days a week. In short we are expected to do much more with less!'

**From interview notes:**

4. [This respondent felt that] success in attracting overseas students, full fee paying students and full fee paying post-graduate students does not necessarily translate into more funds for the successful area. There is also less recognition of individual academic work in this environment – particularly in salary terms.

*e) Focus on FFPS to the detriment of non-FFPS*

**From open-ended questionnaire items:**

1. 'Running course work postgraduate programs has become impossible unless they are full-fee. Our students are not in that position, the courses don't run and there is also a preference for certain kinds of full fee students over others whose needs may bring more expense to the University.'

**From interview notes:**

2. [This respondent's] university has full fee paying undergraduate students and post-graduate students as well as full fee paying overseas students. They are putting more work into full fee paying post graduate students and so there is concern that HECS students are not getting what they should be. This is a problem. With overseas students there is concern with the language problem but [so far] no marks or results have been changed.
3. [This respondent felt that commercialisation had a] detrimental effect ... on subjects that have predominantly HECS students where tutors and lecturers are less available to them than to overseas students.

*e) Unconcerned or positive about FFPS*

**From open-ended questionnaire items:**

1. 'Even the negatives are ok by me: I have no problem with fee paying students: without them, conditions for my DEETYA students would be worse. If it intensifies my own work load, hell, I'm old and ornery: I know ways to carry the intensified load and make it work.'
2. I am fortunate that there is a heavy overlap between HECS load and fee paying teaching and that the former tends to drive the latter.

## Appendix

### Reported instances of preference for full fee-paying students

1. Dr Ted Steele, Associate Professor of biology at the University of Wollongong said he had been told to increase the grades of honours students. 'I had warned the department that we were devaluing the degree...it's not fair on the student either, because it gives them unrealistic expectations', he said.

*Source: SMH 9/1/01*

2. Basically if you paid your money then you would receive the piece of paper. It made a mockery of education. The senior management were not the least bit concerned about lowering standards.

Helen Evans (postgraduate lecturer for 10 years, resigned in 1998).

*Source: Business Review Weekly, July 2000*

[www.brw.com.au/stories/20000728/6559.htm](http://www.brw.com.au/stories/20000728/6559.htm)

3. Queensland: 'In a recent course, there was a cohort of 60 plus fee-paying students enrolled in X degree. All of these people got 28-33 marks on the assignments and the great majority about 10-15 out of 66 on the exam. They passed. There seemed no way that they could copy assignments – none of them were good enough to copy from'.

*Source: SMH 9/1/01*

4. Reports that the Queensland University of Technology have been passing students in a business law subject, despite the student's initial failure marks of 31 per cent, prompted a written complaint to the university from Course Lecturer, Michael Hocken, in which he stated that he had not been consulted about the supplementary testing and claimed the proportional reduction in exam time and number of questions could never justify giving additional assessment to two 'fail' students and two '3' students. 'The Graduate School of Business appears to have changed the results of four students' he said. *Source: Courier Mail 3/2/01*

5. I am a Harvard Business School MBA who has been teaching MBA students in Australia and overseas for 25 years. In the past 8 years or so I have witnessed at close range the dumbing down phenomenon you reported. ...we are doing harm if we award University certificates for the completion of undemanding, low level programs. The graduates of these programs may actually think they are qualified managers.

Professor Ian Scarman, University of South Australia.

*Source: Business Review Weekly, July 2000*

6. Western Australia: 'we will have to work out what to do with people who are enrolled in X but who are not competent to do the calculations. I don't want to sit on a plane or drive over a bridge designed by one of these people'.

*Source: SMH 9/1/01*

7. A professor at a West Australian university commented ‘we are compelled to accept weaker and weaker students and we are getting close to the bottom of the barrel in some cases...a culture of low-grade cheating and copying eventually compromises the learning process’.

*Source: SMH 16/1/01*

8. Governments all over the world may save some funds thanks to fee paying students but pay much more in the future due to poor professional standards. At least one doctorate has been given to a person who was found by Newcastle University to have plagiarised content throughout the course. Engineering academic.

*Source: SMH Chatline 9-16 January 2001*

9. ‘Until recently I was employed as academic coordinator on the language centre of a Victorian university. ... The language centre staff were under great pressure to pass these people prematurely so that they could meet the entry deadlines for their courses. In many cases people were accepted into the faculties of several universities with inadequate English and study skills. Mike Puleston

*Source: letter to the editor, The Age, 28 February 2001*

10. Tasmania: ‘This year we have a full-fee-paying student who, as a repeat student gained 29 per cent in her mid-year exams. We have been instructed to give her a second examination although she has no chance of passing’.

*Source: SMH 9 January 2001*

11. An anonymous Queensland academic said he had been told to reduce lecture content to high school level to improve the rates of students passing the course. ‘Already the lecture course involved was reduced to 50 per cent of its previous length and more difficult material – still relevant to [the course] students – was removed’, he said.

*Source: SHM 9 January 2001*

13. Curtin University of Technology will appoint an external investigator to look into claims that a fee-paying student will be allowed to graduate after she submitted plagiarised work, failed a unit and was granted a conceded pass.

*Source: The Australian, 14 February 2001*

14. NSW: ‘I could name half a dozen students off the top of my head...their essays are a tissue of plagiarism. I’ve had to be much more lenient on them than I would otherwise be for plagiarism’.

*Source: SMH 9 January 2001*

15. The executive MBA participants include some really outstanding students. Unfortunately, an increasing number of participants barely completed high school, did not have the capacity for any kind of tertiary academic work but were accepted because they were nominated their employers who were prepared to write the most glowing recommendations and, more importantly, pay the tuition fees charged by the Executive MBA. Anonymous teacher in Executive MBA program.

*Source: Business Review Weekly, July 2000*

16. At Sydney University, a visual arts student confirmed she was awarded a pass mark in a course which she had not attended or handed in any assignments for. When she questioned the result the tutor told her he had been instructed to pass all students.

*Source: SMH 12 January 2001*

17. One academic from a Sydney based university said 'the lecturer records it as a fail but the university records it as a 'resubmit'. Eventually they just wear you down'.

*Source: SMH 25 January 2001*

18. I have become increasingly concerned in the past two years with the way in which many of our students have been accepted into courses...MBA programs are a particular area of concern. Anonymous academic.

*Source: Business Review Weekly, July 2000*

19. 'It shows the true picture of the dumbing down problem and the use of business schools as cash cows.' Anonymous Associate Professor.

*Source: Business Review Weekly, July 2000*

20. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Alison Elliott (a senior academic at a Sydney university) wrote: 'I've been involved in many instances of passing students whose poor academic performance and failure to meet subject requirements, including attendance at lectures and tutorials, indicated a fail grade was in order. We've passed students who have failed exams, missed exams...and students planning to be schoolteachers who have "reading disabilities" and "learning difficulties". The concern, of course, is that some students who should have failed because they could not satisfactorily complete assignment tasks and exams eventually gain their degrees'.

*Source: SMH 10/1/01*

21. ...senior people constantly buckle to the 'customer' who greedily demands that 'non failed' piece of parchment which offers a ticket to riches. The problem for the future is that that degree may be so devalued that the ticket to success may actually become questioned by employers. Anonymous university administrator.

*Source: Business Review Weekly, July 2000*

22. At the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), information technology exam results were discarded in the final course assessment after students who failed complained.

*Source: SMH 12 January 2001*

23. I believe that the problem stems from undergraduate studies, where there is pressure to pass such students, thus setting a dangerous precedent. Anon. Former sessional tutor and lecturer.

*Source: Business Review Weekly, July 2000*

24. I was a tutor at Swinburne University in 1996 and was so appalled by the academic standards, or more correctly the lack of them, that I decided I did not want to continue the following year. Generally, I was aware that when it came to marking that a certain proportion of students had to pass. This isn't the way I saw it...I failed poor work and passed what deserved to. This was sometimes unappreciated and I believe that many of the students I failed were subsequently passed, though I don't know this. In another instance I found that nearly a fifth of the papers I marked had engaged in a very unobvious form of plagiarism with at least one other student. This is an automatic fail as far as I see.

*Source: Email received by the Australia Institute, January 2001*

25. I've spoken to friends who have ceased to tutor because they won't lower their standards as required; I've spoken to academics drummed out of Unis for their nonconformity and sheer guts, and broken by that experience. A friend at (X university) has suffered appallingly, not regarding assessment but for challenging the powers that be, including wealthy patrons.

*Source: Email received by the Australia Institute, January 2001*

26. I have experienced pressure to pass students because they were full fee paying, so it does happen.

*Source: SMH Chatline 9-16 January 2001*

27. I have worked as a casual lecturer at Uni and it's not just full-fee-paying students that get a better deal. In fact since the HECS scheme came in in the late '80s, there has been increasing pressure on uni's to pass their 'clients'. Plus it is a well-known fact that casual tutors and lecturers tend to give higher marks than the full-time (tenured) staff. If you're a casual lecturer (1) you aren't allowed to fail many students, and (2) you don't want to, because you probably won't be re-employed next year if you cause too many problems. Phil Lipson.

*Source: SMH Chatline 9-16 January 2001*

28. From experience, there are students lacking basic English skills passing their Int. Business degrees at QUT. These students have no idea what the subject is about, yet somehow manage to pass. What the hell is that all about then?

*Source: BRW Online [www.brw.com.au/stories/20000728/6559.htm](http://www.brw.com.au/stories/20000728/6559.htm)*

29. 'in our course...that relies to a large degree on overseas students ...every year that I was involved in teaching and examining....there would be a significant number of students whose exam performances were hopeless i.e. well below cut-off for [a] pass in own undergraduates, yet we would be coerced to arrange for 'remediation' or to run oral

exams, with the end result that students didn't learn any more, but would obtain their qualification and all would graduate. In effect, nobody was allowed to fail.'

*Email passed to the Australia Institute, 9 March 2001*

30. 'In my former department....our Head was always telling us to supervise OS students who were on various scholarships. The fact that some of these students were of (an) extremely poor standard and/or had requested a wish for training in areas we could not provide was immaterial. I would flatly refuse to take these students on, so that my less assertive colleagues would inherit them. And the students always passed, even when they had virtually written nothing in the exam. It was embarrassing and awkward to question this at staff meetings as we all depended on a good word from our Head when it came to promotions, study leave etc.'

*Email passed to the Australia Institute, 9 March 2001 (29 and 30 are from the same email, but refer to separate incidents)*

31. 'This is an issue which has brought me much anxiety over the last few years. The ONLY students that I have ever had to get paper(s) 're-graded' or 'co-graded' are our foreign students. For me there is no doubt in my mind that we are prostituting ourselves for the foreign student....I was forced to take on an honours student. I had had the student in a range of classes over the three years of her pass degree. She was a very weak student. She had failed a number of 2<sup>nd</sup> yr units but managed to arrange filler courses to get her into third year...She left this university with a 2A honours degree. She did not deserve an honours degree from this university.'

*Email passed to the Australia Institute, 9 March 2001*