



Dr Michael Spence AC

Vice-Chancellor and Principal

08 September 2017

Senator Jane Hume MP
Chair, Senate Economics Legislation Committee

By email: economics.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator,

Medicare Levy Amendment (National Disability Insurance Scheme Funding) Bill 2017 and 10 related bills [provisions]

The University of Sydney wishes to place on the record its strong support for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), but also its strong opposition to the passage of the Nation-building Funds Repeal (National Disability Insurance Scheme Funding) Bill 2017 (the Bill). In doing so, we offer our support for the submissions that Universities Australia (UA) and the Group of Eight (Go8) universities have made on behalf of their respective universities.

If passed by the Senate, the Bill will close the Education Investment Fund (EIF) and transfer the \$3.76 billion remaining in the fund to support the NDIS. We strongly support the NDIS as a landmark and transformational social policy reform. However, we believe that abolishing the EIF to help fund the NDIS is short sighted and a false economy.

Combined with other major recent and proposed cuts to funding for higher education and research, abolishing the EIF will have long-term implications for the quality, economic impact, and international competitiveness of Australia's higher education and research systems.

Closing the EIF will also have profound implications for our future national capacity to attract global talent and to create the new knowledge industries and high-value jobs that will be vital if our economy is to remain strong in the face of globalisation and advances in technology.

We are very fortunate to have received funding from the EIF for two transformational education and research infrastructure projects:

- our [Charles Perkins Centre](#), which is now the home of our Centre for Obesity, Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease; and
- the [Sydney Nanoscience Hub](#), which houses the Australian Institute for Nanoscale Science and Technology (AINST) and two core national research facilities (in microscopy and microanalysis, and nanofabrication).

We firmly believe that the existence of the EIF was a critical catalyst for both the conceptualisation and realisation of these two major projects. The possibility of EIF funding served to stimulate us, and many other universities, to develop concrete plans for ground-breaking teaching and research infrastructure projects, that simply would not have been conceived of without the EIF.



In the case of our Charles Perkins Centre – obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease are the leading causes of death and disability in Australia, accounting for 40 per cent of deaths and morbidity. The escalation of the cost of providing care for people afflicted by these diseases is threatening the sustainability of Australia’s health system, and is placing ever-growing pressure on the Commonwealth budget.

In 2009 we received \$95 million from the EIF towards a total construction cost of \$385 million to create a building capable of supporting a multi-disciplinary strategy to addressing these great health challenges. The resulting purpose-built facility opened in 2014 at our Camperdown campus adjacent to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. It provides state-of-the-art facilities and technology for more than 1500 undergraduate students, 900 researchers and higher degree by research students.

The project created 330 direct jobs and had an estimated economic spill-over impact of over \$1 billion during its construction phase. Securing EIF funding for the Charles Perkins Centre has enabled us to pursue innovative approaches that are highly attractive to donors and industry partners. For example, we have just passed the \$100 million mark in donations for Centre initiatives, and recently announced a partnership with Qantas to collaborate on research and education programs to reshape the long haul travel experience.¹

In the case of the Sydney Nano Science Hub – nanoscience and nanotechnology are changing the world as we know it. Our aim is to ensure that Australia is at the forefront of these advances in fields including quantum computing, communications technology, astronomy and medical devices. Funding of \$40 million from the EIF enabled us to establish in Sydney a research facility with a total cost of around \$150 million that is unsurpassed in the southern hemisphere. Without the EIF support, we would not have been able to create a facility of such scale and quality. It has enabled us to bring together in one facility experts from across the disciplines (and around the world) to develop new nanoscale technologies for social and economic benefit, and to train the next generations of scientists and engineers with skills and research expertise in nanoscience.

The Sydney Nanoscience Hub and the AINST opened in 2016. Together they are already significantly expanding our collaborations with high-tech businesses in Australia and internationally. For example, Microsoft’s recent decision to deepen its quantum computing partnership with us is likely to be one of the largest investments in industry/university collaboration in Australia, while there is interest from other leading global R&D companies including Intel and Lockheed Martin.²

Once the EIF is cut, no other university-dedicated Commonwealth infrastructure fund will remain. If this occurs, the prospect of transformational education and research projects such as the Charles Perkins Centre and Sydney Nanoscience Hub getting off the ground in the future will be greatly diminished. There will be significant flow-on consequences for the competitiveness of our higher education and research institutions, and for future economic activity and job creation.

For these reasons, before committee members decide their position on the Bill, we urge them to visit facilities made possible by the EIF to see first-hand how the projects are delivering profound benefits for students, researchers, industry, and local economies. We would certainly welcome committee members for site visits to our two EIF-supported facilities if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

(signature removed)

Stephen Garton
Acting Vice-Chancellor

¹ <https://www.qantasnewsroom.com.au/media-releases/qantas-and-charles-perkins-centre-announce-world-first-air-travel-health-and-wellbeing-partnership/>

² <http://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2017/07/25/microsoft-and-university-of-sydney-forge-quantum-partnership.html>