



**Response to the Senate Employment and Education
Legislation Committee inquiry:
Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment
(A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher
Education System) Bill 2017**

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Contact information

CAUL Communication and Policy Officer (CPO)

PO Box 8169

Australian National University

ACT 0200

cpo@caul.edu.au

www.caul.edu.au

Phone +61 2 6125 2990

Overview

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is the peak leadership organisation for university libraries in Australia. CAUL's vision is that society is transformed through the power of research, teaching and learning. University libraries are essential knowledge and information infrastructures that enable student achievement and research excellence.

CAUL makes a significant contribution to higher education strategy, policy and outcomes through a commitment to a shared purpose:

To transform how people experience knowledge – how it can be discovered, used and shared.

CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia. University libraries are diverse institutions and an important piece of knowledge infrastructure. They intersect core university business, and have responsibilities for aspects of research, learning and teaching.

CAUL greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry, in response to the Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill 2017 (the Bill) to amend the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (the Legislation).

CAUL supports embedding the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) as a grant under Schedule 4 of the legislation.

However, CAUL shares the concerns expressed by Universities Australia in regards to other proposed higher education reforms being introduced by the Bill.

Particularly CAUL is concerned by the potential negative impact to quality posed by two funding measures:

- the proposed efficiency dividend of 2.5% pa, and
- the 7.5% of CGS funding to be made contingent on 'certain performance requirements' that include student attrition, completion and satisfaction.

CAUL recommends that the proposed efficiency dividend and performance contingent funding not go ahead, unless it can be shown that their implementation will not negatively impact the quality of services and outcomes delivered by Australian universities.

Background

Today university libraries make do with less, while the number of EFT students and total library expenditure continues to increase (Figure 1). Despite this, Figure 2 shows that library expenditure on information resources per population member (staff and students) only increased minimally, from \$240.97pa in 2001 to \$308.32pa in 2015. That is an increase of \$68.65 (28%) over the last fifteen years, while CPI has increased approximately 40.5% (at an average of 2.7% pa) from 2001 to 2015¹.

In this time the number of library staff positions has been decreasing. Figure 3 shows that in 2001 university libraries had 0.72 staff positions per 100 student EFT, and that by 2015 the number of staff positions had decreased to 0.36 per 100 EFT.

University libraries have also embraced the opportunities presented by digital technologies. Figure 4 shows that in 2005 there were no E-books accessible through university libraries, but that by 2015 the total number of E-books had risen to nearly 15 million. At the same time, the number of loaned items (such as books) had decreased significantly.

Despite these constraints, student satisfaction with library services has remained high. Figure 5 shows that the percentage of positive scores for Learning Resources items in QILT surveys from 2013 to 2016 has remained at 79% or above.

CAUL is concerned, however, that the proposed efficiency dividend and the performance contingent funding are asking too much of Australia's universities. Will the proposed changes lead to even stricter attrition, completion and satisfaction targets?

A recent paper by Universities Australia² reports that since 2011-12 universities have endured significant funding cuts, contributing some \$3.9 billion dollars towards improving the Australian Government's budget bottom line.

Yet despite continuing funding cuts, universities must still meet the current and new requirements placed on them by the Higher Education Standards Framework 2015 and other legislation. They must continue to play a fundamental role in learning, teaching and research for the betterment of Australian society.

How much further can they be stretched before universities are no longer able to deliver the quality services and student outcomes expected of them?

In light of this CAUL recommends that the proposed efficiency dividend and performance contingent funding not go ahead, unless it can be shown that their implementation will not negatively impact the quality of services and outcomes delivered by Australian universities.

¹ Figures referenced from the RBA. <http://www.rba.gov.au/inflation/measures-cpi.html>, viewed 8/6/2017

² Universities Australia (2017). The Facts on university Funding. Universities Australia, Canberra. <<https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/Media-and-Events/submissions-and-reports/The-facts-on-university-funding/The-facts-on-university-funding>>

Data sources and figures

Library data used in Figures 1 - 4, including expenditure, population, staff position numbers, Ebooks and item loans are retrieved from CAUL library statistical data. CAUL has been collecting statistical data about university libraries since 1953, and maintains a website³ where data can be accessed publically.

Student Equivalent Full Time load (EFT) data used in Figures 1 and 3 were retrieved from the Australian Government uCube⁴ website.

QILT data used in Figure 5 were retrieved from the student experience survey national reports 2013 – 2016⁵. Data used is the percentage of positive scores for learning resources items, under the learning resources focus area (For example table 42 in the 2016 report).

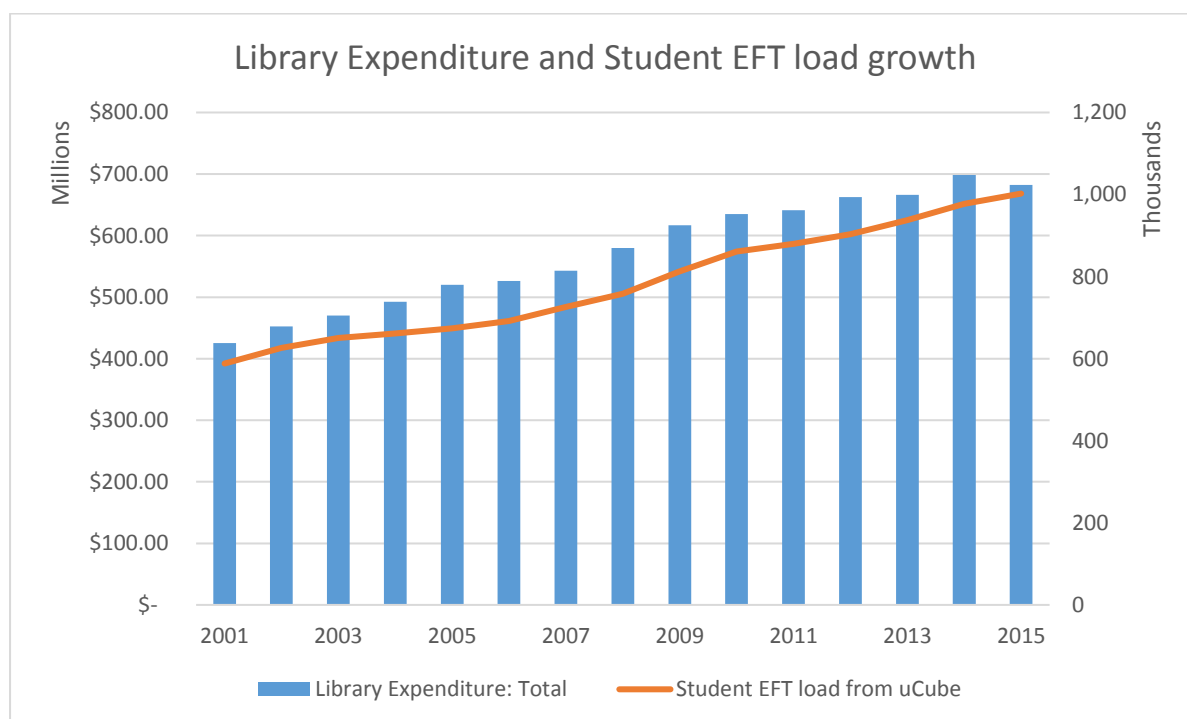


Figure 1 Library Expenditure and Student EFT load growth

³ <https://statistics.caul.edu.au>, viewed 8/6/2017

⁴ <http://highereducationstatistics.education.gov.au>, viewed 8/6/2017

⁵ <https://www.qilt.edu.au/about-this-site/student-experience>, viewed 8/6/2017

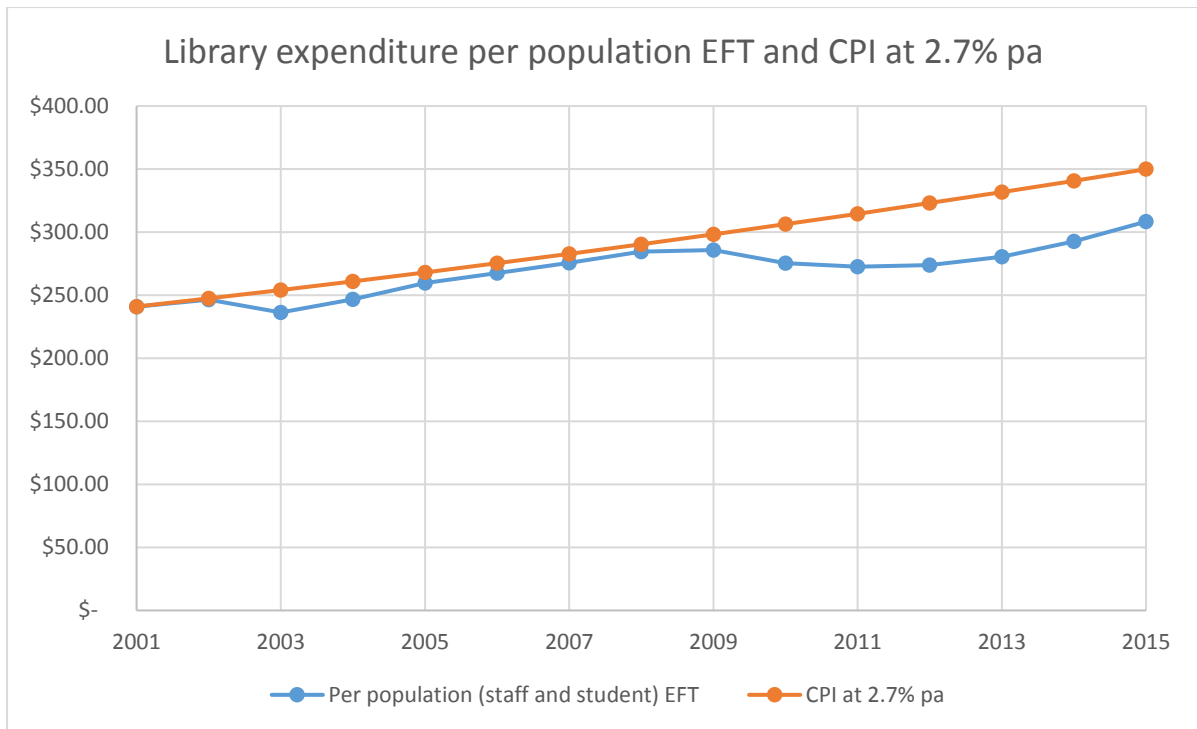


Figure 2 Library expenditure per population EFT and CPI at avg. 2.7% pa

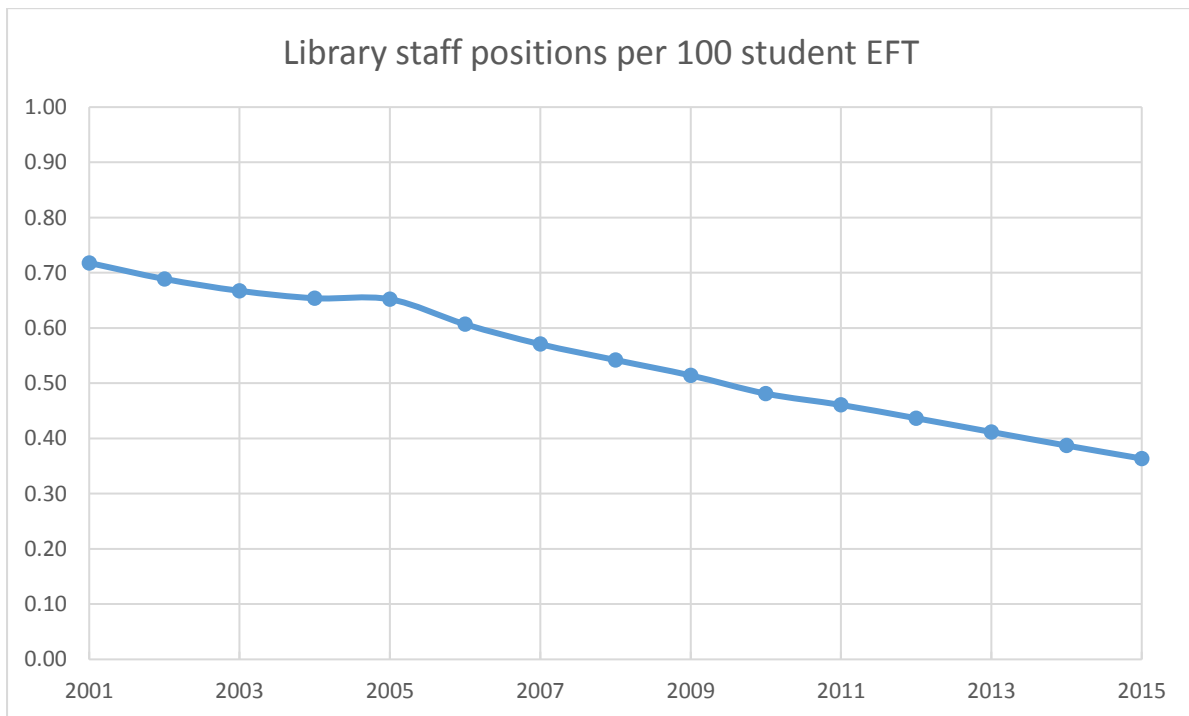


Figure 3 Library staff positions per 100 student EFT

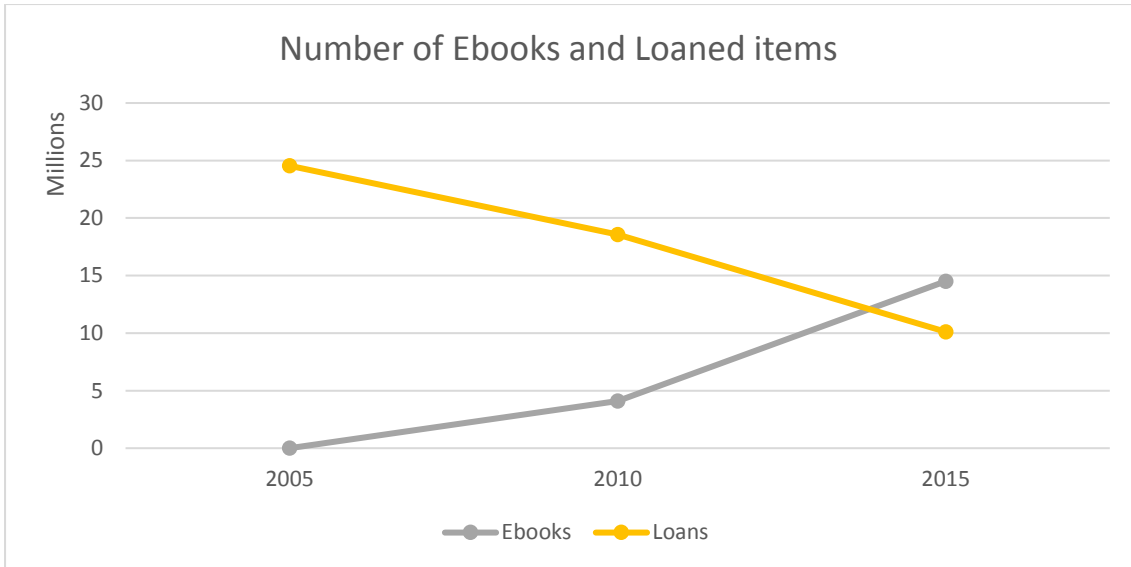


Figure 4 Number of Ebooks and Loaned items

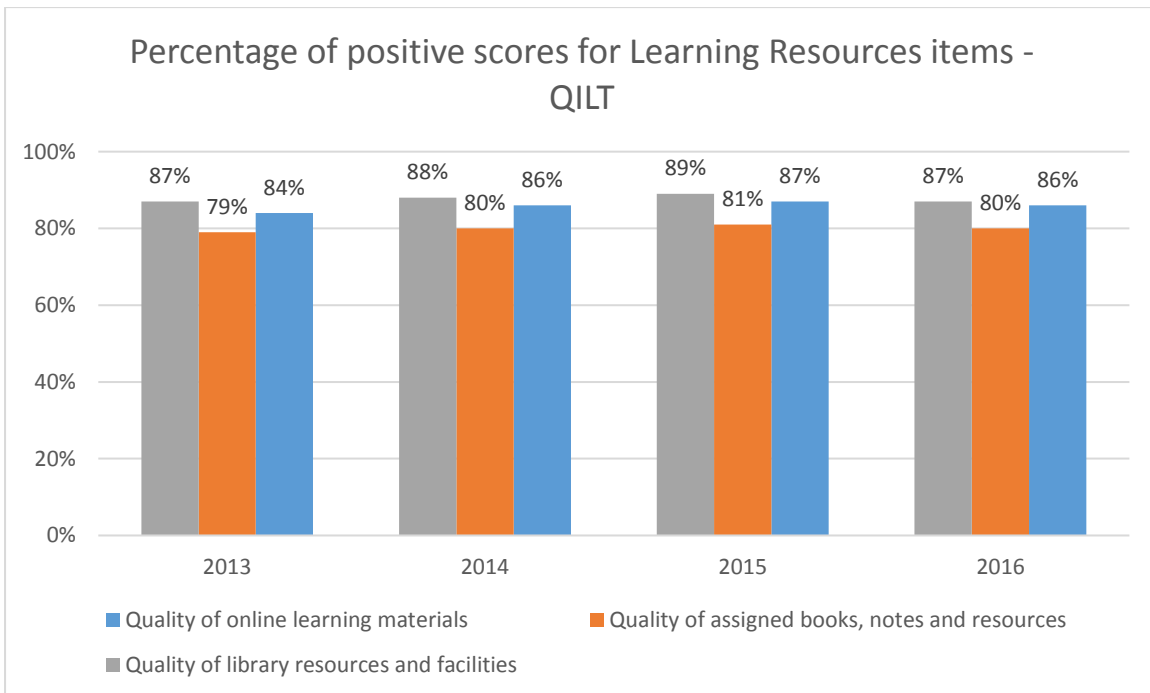


Figure 5 Percentage of positive scores for Learning Resources items - QILT