

Register, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1911.

# THE UNIVERSITY COMMISSION.

## FIRST SITTING.

### MR. WILLIAMS'S EVIDENCE.

The University Commission appointed at the instance of Mr. Ryan, M.P., held its first sitting on Friday at Parliament House. There were present Mr. Ryan, M.P. (Chairman), the Hon. A. W. Styles, M.L.C., and Messrs. Peake and Green, M.P.'s. The first witness examined was the Director of Education (Mr. A. Williams), who is also a member of the Council of the Adelaide University.

The Chairman—Has it always been considered that the Director of Education was entitled to a position on the University Council?

Witness—I was not taken into the confidence of the council when I was appointed. I think there was a feeling on the council that the department should be represented.

#### —Brains for the University.—

This commission was formed to enquire and advise on some system of extending facilities for higher education to deserving students to a greater extent than we are able to do at present. What facilities are there in the department to enable deserving students to pass from the public schools to the universities?—The work I have tried to do more than any other is to provide means for industrious boys and girls to pass to the higher institutions. The first step from the primary school is to the district or Adelaide High Schools. To extend these facilities the Government provides 40 scholarships of £22 per annum, tenable for three years, for the benefit of children in the outlying districts.

Why should children take 10 years to pass the university senior examination, and perhaps only one child out of 10 go on to the University?—There are other factors. All boys and girls do not possess brains for University subjects.

#### —Certificates of Proficiency.—

Could not the work of the High Schools be extended so as to give the pupil who has done well there a certificate which would be of equal assistance to him in getting a position to the certificate he has now to obtain at the senior examination of the University?—That is rather a big question, because the people giving the positions must fix the qualification. In Scotland the leaving certificates are obtained on examinations at the school itself. There is a strong movement in some countries to do away with matriculation or the senior examination from the University, and to supersede it by an examination conducted in schools approved by the University. There would be no difficulty in turning out from the High Schools scholars capable of filling Government or other positions for which the qualification of the senior examination was asked.

The Chairman instanced a case in which the son of a labourer, whose father earned 48/ a week, had been trained by a State school teacher to a standard which enabled him to pass the University senior examinations. He had, of course, to pay the fees for the examinations. Why, asked Mr. Ryan, could not the school give him a certificate of equal value to that which he afterwards obtained?

The Director replied that the University examination was common ground on which the children from all schools might meet. If similar certificates were to be given by schools under Government control, the same thing would need to apply to sectarian and other schools. In reply to further questions, Mr. Williams said the cost of training a child from 6 to 14 years of age (tuition only) was about £30.

#### —Demand for High School Training.—

The Chairman—Is the demand for high school training being met by the accommodation?—The movement is new. In the suburbs we have three schools, and in the city the Adelaide High School. The attendance is increasing rapidly, and we shall need bigger schools.

#### —Education in South Australia.—

How do you find the facilities offered to the Adelaide students compare with those given in the Continent and in England?—A complete revolution has come about. Five years ago Australia was doing nothing in comparison with America or England, but in our own State we have made a beginning at secondary education, and it is slowly extending. In Victoria they have not proceeded quite so far, but they have passed a Bill which will enable rapid strides to be made. In New South Wales they are going to take a big step. In Queensland the

Grammar Schools, until recently subsidized, will, I believe, be made State secondary schools, and something similar is going on in Western Australia. In South Australia the secondary schools are free. That is not so in Europe, but it is in America. I believe we are in advance of Victoria with the exception of agricultural high schools; we are not behind New South Wales in our high schools, and the Adelaide High School compares with anything in Australia.

The education system of Australia could not possibly compare, I understand, with the system of New Zealand. Is it because they have been able to get as much money as they wanted?—They started secondary education a long time ago, and have made great advances. They have no difficulty in obtaining whatever money they require for it. A Minister told me the House would grant anything that was asked for secondary education.

#### —Better Scholarships.—

How do you suggest the commission could help deserving students to bridge the gap between the State and higher education otherwise than at present?—Improve the high schools in the country, for it is good to have the children trained as near their homes as possible; and have a more generous system of scholarships to help those remote from district centres.

Have you considered the question of a residential college?—Yes, both from the standpoint of the scholars and of the teachers in training. The responsibility would be so great that personally I would not like to undertake it. Many of our

young people now find homes with friends, and the department keeps a list of desirable places to which they can be sent.

#### —High Schools and Teachers.—

The Director said the chief difficulty against the establishment of additional high schools had been the trouble to obtain suitable teachers. A fair supply was now being trained. The reason why some teachers had left the service was that they joined the Commonwealth military staff for the bigger salaries they could thus obtain. The State had never been badly off for teachers except in faraway places, where conditions of life were uncongenial.

#### —Ideal of a University.—

To Mr. Peake the Director said his ideal of a university was not a glorified college. The main idea would be that it was a place for investigation and research, and for passing on the results to those wanting to enter on further research work. In that respect it was much higher than a college. In a country like Australia, with a small population, they could not organize their educational forces in the way that Great Britain and Germany could, and have particular schools to meet particular needs. In the district high schools the scholars had to be grouped into four or five classes to serve various ends of study, for general training, or as a preliminary for University careers.

Mr. Peake—Do you regard the University as a preparation for professional work?—It should prepare our leaders of the professions.

If the University is a place for the completion of special work we should regard our high schools and colleges as a preparation for the University?—Yes.

The Hon. A. H. Peake—Supposing the State had £50,000 to spend on either University education or the extension of secondary education, which do you think would be the more valuable to the State?—I am a member of the council of the University. (The Chairman—"Dual position." Laughter.) I think the secondary schools would do the greater good. The students must be prepared for the University.

Then no one should be qualified to go into the University unless carefully prepared for entry?—As a rule; there may be exceptions, such as in the case of a genius.

Do you agree with the division of the educational system into primary, secondary, and university, or superior regarding the last as equal terms?—That is a qualification one must agree with, but it leaves no room for technical education.

#### —The Open Door.—

What about the idea that the University should be so wide that everybody should go in? Would that be much advantage?—I have never thought that every child should go to a university. There will always be a comparatively small proportion ready to finish there. I would like to see opportunities for all who are ready and willing to take advantage of them; but that percentage is not so great as some imagine. Before the University can be made of much more use in connection with the State school system, the facilities for secondary education must be extended and enlarged.

I am working towards the ideal that the State school should be so conducted that it will be possible for every child to proceed to the high school, and thence to the University.

Would it not be of great value if all children going into the world could produce one certificate as a standard of competency when applying for a position?—I have been working towards that, and we shall issue two such certificates for those who spend two years at the high school, and for those who spend three or four years and take the fuller course.

You think it would be possible to set up a certificate which would meet the requirements of the different Government services and to get them to accept it?—Yes.

You regard the University as of value as an examining body?—Yes, it raises the standard of work throughout all the schools. It may be said, on the other hand, that these examinations dominate too greatly the work of the schools; but there is a good deal to be said on both sides of the question.

#### —Adequacy of Bursaries.—

On the subject of exhibitions and bursaries Mr. Williams said he had known one boy who could not go on to the University because the amount of the bursary did not much more than cover the price of the books and the fees. His father was a ganger with 9/ or 10/ a day, and had a big family to look after.

Mr. Peake—Has the allowances made to students hitherto been regarded as adequate or an assistance?—I think as an assistance. Living is expensive, and a young man coming to town would have to pay 15/ to £1 a week for lodging, £14 a year University fees, and £5 for books. Thus £25 is not adequate. The amount should be increased. It might be framed in such a way that special cases as where the parents are poor can be dealt with on a more generous scale. They do that in New South Wales.

Does not that open up a question of invidious distinction?—I don't like invidious distinctions. Suppose it were increased to £35, and a clause put in that in special circumstances the Minister could give more up to a certain maximum. The Corporation of Liverpool gives £10,000 to its University, and another £1,000 earmarked for four students. The Vice-Chancellor of the University, without anybody else knowing it, makes it possible for a man in poor circumstances to take out his University course. Such a power might wisely be given to the Minister in South Australia, where all the accounts are audited so carefully.

#### —A Sorry Admission.—

Are the applications for the exhibitions and bursaries which already exist greatly outnumbered?—I was greatly disappointed this year with the exhibitions to take the boys from the primary schools to the district high schools. Forty were granted, and only four were awarded.

What do you attribute that to?—I am not yet prepared to give the cause for it. I have determined to write to the parents in The Children's Hour drawing attention to it.

This is almost crucial, for we were given to understand that there were not sufficient facilities. From what you say we are driven to the conclusion that those which

exist at great expense are not availed of?—It is not so crucial as it might appear. This is the first stage in the matter of exhibitions or prizes, and the first year they have come in. Though we advertised them through The Education Gazette and The Children's Hour perhaps they were not advertised sufficiently.

#### —Payment of Teachers.—

How does the payment of teachers in New Zealand compare with ours?—It is slightly higher in some ways. They give an assistant teacher to a school with an average attendance of over 30. If we did that it would increase our expenditure by thousands of pounds.

I understand the high schools' further extension has been hampered by want of teaching staffs; are you overcoming that?—Yes; but not quite so quickly as I would like.

Have you plenty of applicants for the work?—All our teaching students are anxious to take it. There is also no shortage of applicants for the ordinary school service. The number has been increasing.

#### —The Minimum Wage.—

You have lately made an increase of salaries to school teachers. Are they yet paid equal to £2 8/ a week, the amount paid for unskilled labour? Is there any provisional school teacher being a male of 21 still being paid less than that amount?—I don't think we have any number receiving under £100 a year.

January 11, 1911.

## HIGHER EDUCATION.

### ROYAL COMMISSION'S SITTINGS.

#### PRE-UNIVERSITY TRAINING.

The University Commission met in Parliament House yesterday. Mr. Ryan, M.P. (chairman), Hon. A. W. Styles, M.L.C., and Messrs. Peake and Green, M.'sP., were also present. The first witness examined was the Director of Education (Mr. A. Williams).

In reply to the chairman the witness stated that he was not taken into the confidence of the University council when he was appointed, and could not say whether it was always considered that the Director of Education should have a seat on the University council. He thought, however, that there was a feeling that the department should be represented on the council. With regard to providing facilities for deserving students to pass from the public schools to the University, he had tried to do all he could to promote means for industrious boys to pass from the State schools to the higher institutions. The first step from the primary school was to the district or Adelaide high schools. To give those facilities the Government provided 40 scholarships of £22 per annum tenable for three years. These were granted for the benefit of children in the outlying districts. Various factors militated against children passing the University examinations. All boys and girls did not possess the brains or the application for University subjects. The extension of the high school privileges so as to give the pupil who had done well there a certificate equal to the certificate obtained at the University senior examination was a big question. This was due to the fact that the people giving positions fixed the qualifications. In many countries there was a strong movement to do away with matriculation or the senior examination and to supersede it by an examination conducted in schools approved by the University. He saw no difficulty in the way of turning out high school scholars capable of filling Government or other positions for which the qualification of a senior examination was asked. University examinations were regarded as common ground on which the children from all schools could meet. If similar certificates were to be given by schools under Government control the same thing would need to apply to sectarian and other schools. In reply to further questions, Mr. Williams said the cost of training a child from 6 to 14 years of age (tuition only) was about £30. High school training was a new movement. About Adelaide there were three such schools in the suburbs, while in the city there was the Adelaide High School. The attendance was increasing rapidly, and very soon much bigger schools would be needed. In the matter of affording educational facilities for students a complete revolution had come about. Only five years ago when they compared Australia with England and America they had to admit that nothing was being done in the matter of secondary education. South Australia was in advance of Victoria, but that State was likely to make great strides under its Education Bill. New South Wales had done fine things, and looked like going in for more comprehensive schemes. In Queensland the grammar schools until recently were subsidised, and it looked as if the Government intended to make them their secondary schools. A similar step seemed likely to be taken by Western Australia. With the exception of agricultural high schools, he believed that South Australia was in advance of Victoria. In his opinion the Adelaide High School compared favorably with anything of the kind in Australia. New Zealand started secondary education before any of the Australian States, and great advances had been made there. It appeared that in the Dominion they had no difficulty in getting any money wanted voted for educational purposes.

In answer to Mr. Peake, Mr. Williams said if the State had £50,000 to spend on education, he believed the best thing they could do would be to spend it on secondary schools. Students should be carefully prepared for entering the University.

Mr. Peake—Then no one should be qualified to go into the University unless carefully prepared for entry?—As a rule; there may be exceptions, such as in the case of a genius.

Do you agree with the division of the educational system into primary, secondary, and university or superior, regarding the last as equal terms?—That is a qualification one must agree with, but it leaves no room for technical education.

After examining Mr. Williams on other points the commission adjourned until Monday, at 11 am.