



Media Statement - 6 April 2020  
For immediate release

## **TUU research shows students in distress as a result of UTAS Covid-19 response**

A research report currently underway at the Tasmania University Union (TUU) shows that Tasmania's students are suffering due to financial and academic stress.

In accordance with public health advice, UTAS elected to move classes online in response to the COVID-19 virus.

As a result of these changes, and the broader impacts of the virus, the TUU has been hearing stories of frustration and distress from students.

"First we heard feedback through social media and our student reps. Now we have a formal research piece where we are capturing sentiment and student requests, and are lobbying the University to meet those needs," said Braydon Broad, President of the TUU.

The student survey highlights the impact that the coronavirus has had on those enrolled at UTAS. Of biggest concern were the fees continuing to be charged by the University, with 84% requesting tuition fee discounts.

Students note issues such as digital disruption and disadvantage, online security concerns, and a reduction in quality of lessons due to the rush to make previously offline units work in an online-only environment.

Many students, especially full fee-paying international students, are unhappy that they are expected to pay full fees for what they consider to be a 'pilot run' of what may eventually be successful future delivery.

Students with significant practical elements to their courses are left wondering how their now theory-based education will compare. UTAS has been very focused on working through these problems with student representatives as much as possible, but it is becoming clear that even the most proactive efforts to shift learning online cannot match the quality of learning that students have previously enjoyed.

Add to that the significant job losses and subsequent drop in income for these already low-income students, and it is little wonder they are requesting a discount to help cover the costs of their basic needs such as food and housing.

“UTAS and the TUU are both running financial welfare programs to assist students. It has been encouraging to see an increase in funds and a relaxing of welfare application and assessment processes by the University, but they really do need to do more,” said Mr Broad.

Many students are also struggling with mental ill-health, citing rapid change and academic stress.

“This is a traumatic event at an international level. To think that students can just carry on and adjust to all the changes in their personal and academic lives with no impact to their mental health is completely unrealistic,” said Mr Broad.

A drop in quality since going online was the second highest concern noted by students, topped only by a desire to discount fees. This drop in quality combined with the massive adjustments many students have had to make in relation to their learning has led 77% of students surveyed to request that any failed units this semester are removed from their academic transcripts.

“The TUU has met with UTAS on a number of occasions to make requests on behalf of the students, including meeting with senior leaders yesterday,” said Mr Broad.

As a result of student feedback, the TUU has made several requests of the University, including:

- Extend the mid-semester break to give students a chance to adjust to the rapid changes
- Do not record failing grades for this semester
- Discount tuition fees

“We are confident that we will see some changes as a result of our lobbying efforts, but we know there’s a long way to go before students are satisfied with the outcome,” he said.

The survey remains open, with updates being given to the University at regular intervals by the TUU. If students would like to have their say, they should find the TUU Vent Tent link at [tuu.com.au](http://tuu.com.au)

**END**

**For more information or interviews:** Braydon Broad, TUU President | 0429 336 920 | [bjbroad@utas.edu.au](mailto:bjbroad@utas.edu.au)