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AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY BILL, 1965.

Second Reading Speech by the Prime Minister,
the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies K.T., C.H., Q.C.,

House of Representatives. December, 1965.



This Bill proposes several amendments to the Act under which the Australian National University operates. Some of these amendments meet the desire of the University Council, agreed to by the Government, to abolish the office of Principal of the School of General Studies when Professor Herbert Burton retires at the end of this year. Professor Burton has, of course, rendered long and meritorious service both as Principal of the School and before that as Principal of the former Canberra University College. The other amendments, largely of a technical character, have also been proposed by the Council and accepted by the Government.

The University Council, when seeking to have the position of Principal of the School of General Studies abolished, felt it desirable to have in its stead a part-time position of Deputy-Chairman of the Board of the School. The Government agreed. This position will not be occupied for a long period by any one person. Over the years its responsibilities will be shared by several. The new arrangement will give the School the same relationship to the Vice-Chancellor and the Council as the Institute of Advanced Studies now has through the existing office of Deputy-Chairman of the Board of the Institute. We have deemed it desirable to recognize the status of the School of General Studies within the University by requiring the position of Deputy-Chairman of its Board to be chosen from among the Professors of the School.

As the office of Principal of the School is a statutory one, it is therefore now necessary to delete from the Act all references to it and to insert, where necessary, references to the new office of Deputy-Chairman of the Board of the School. This operation accounts for many of the clauses in this Bill.

Associated with this change is provision to relieve the Vice-Chancellor of his present obligation to preside at meetings of the Boards of the Institute and of the School when he is present. It is intended that the Deputy-Chairman of each Board should be empowered to preside at a meeting of that Board at which the Vice-Chancellor is present, if called upon by the Vice-Chancellor to do so.

A further amendment deals with provision for securing representation of the University's undergraduates on the Council. At present the undergraduates elect a member, but the person elected is required to be a student of the University being aged at least twenty-one and a graduate "of at least two years standing". Time has shown that very few such eligible candidates are available. In cases where they are available they tend to be out of touch with current undergraduate opinion. It has therefore been decided to remove the requirement that candidates have two years standing as a graduate, with a consequent increase in the field of eligible candidates for election to the Council as the students' representative.

The opportunity has also been taken to insert a provision which will permit the University to enter into certain types of contracts without being obliged to use its common seal. This obligation has proved cumbersome in the University's more routine day to day business operations. The terms of this Bill would permit the University to dispense with the use of its common seal when entering into contracts which, if entered into by private persons, would not be required to be under seal. A similar provision applies to certain other statutory bodies, for example the Australian National Airlines Commission.

A further provision is that which empowers the University to waive fees in the case of State Forestry Scholarship holders. When the University undertook to establish a Department of Forestry, and to take over the work of the Australian Forestry School, which it did from the beginning of the 1965 academic year, it was faced with doubts concerning its power to remit the tuition fees of Forestry students undertaking training on the nomination of various State Governments. By long standing Commonwealth-State agreement, no tuition fees have been paid by the States in respect of their nominated students at the Australian Forestry School. This amendment would permit this arrangement to apply without doubt in the new circumstances. It is Government policy for it to do so.

In connection with the transfer of the responsibility for advanced forestry education from the Australian Forestry School to the Australian National University, legislative action is required to ensure that the provisions of the Officers' Rights Declaration Act, 1928-1959, apply to permanent Commonwealth Public Servants who were on the staff of the Australian Forestry School and have now accepted appointment with the Australian National University. Provision has accordingly been made in this Bill for the purpose, as a result of which those officers transferred will have to opt within a period of three months for employment under either Australian National University or Commonwealth Service conditions.

Finally the opportunity is being taken in presenting the Bill to the House to repeal certain sections of the Australian National University Act, 1960, the operation of which is now exhausted. The 1960 Act incorporated transitional provisions which were required as part of the process of merging the former Canberra University College with the original Australian National University. The sections for repeal are of a technical nature only.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.