

BOND CHIEF WARNS OF UNI 'CONTROLS'

CONTROL of Bond University's governing council remained a major stumbling block to the sale of the Gold Coast campus to the University of Queensland (UQ), a Senate inquiry was told yesterday.

"It's very much a sticking point," said Bond executive chancellor Professor Harry Messel.

Bond University Ltd (BUL) financial adviser Malcolm Turnbull told the hearing there was a very real conflict of interest in UQ being represented on the board because the two institutions were in competition with each other in the higher education sector.

Professor Messel and Mr Turnbull rejected suggestions that Bond, Australia's first private university, would go broke if the proposed deal with UQ fell through.

Professor Messel said Bond had put in a reasonable bid for the land and had been 'staggered' by UQ's bid, believed to be \$108 million.

Bond wanted to see independent members of the community represented on its board and was concerned that even a minority representation by UQ would lead to domination of Bond by that institution because of the powerful individuals involved.

"We are trying to negotiate with an elephant and we're a mouse - but we're a very strong mouse," he said.

The Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee is inquiring into whether the sale of Bond to a public institution is in the national interest and in particular whether it would lead to a reduction in diversity in tertiary education.

The sale follows the break-up of Bond Corp and the financial collapse in 1993 of its Japanese joint venture partner EIE International.

Earlier, UQ Chancellor Sir Llew Edwards told the committee his institution had no interest in taking over the running of Bond University.

The deal involved the



BOND BANNER: Protesting students make their point outside the Senate Inquiry, staged at Parliament House in Brisbane

purchase of the campus, involving some 350 hectares of land, of which at least 150 hectares zoned for university purposes would be retained.

There was agreement 'in principle' that the governing council consist of three members from UQ, three from Bond and five independents, he said.

Sir Llew rejected as 'malicious and untrue' rumours put to him by Labor Senator Kim Carr that public money was being diverted to raise funds to make the purchase.

UQ would be the saviour of Bond, which had been 'going backwards' with declining student enrolments, increasing debt and poor morale.

It was a fallacy that the two institutions would be in competition, he said.

Sir Llew declined to comment in public hearing on whether the rumoured price of \$108 million included taking on the \$95 million debt owed by Bond.

The hearing continues in Canberra today.

Students angry at sale

BOND University students demonstrated outside Parliament House in Brisbane yesterday during the sittings of a Senate inquiry into the proposed \$108 million University of Queensland takeover of Bond.

The Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee is inquiring into whether the sale of Bond to a public institution is in the national interest.

Student council president Martyn Cox said students were opposed to the sale of a private university to a public institution.

"We want to uphold the independence of Bond University which has seen it flourish," he said.

Mr Cox said the 1600 students at Bond were 'as one' in opposing the takeover.

Bond University was 'like a big family' with an excellent student-to-staff ratio of 10-1.

"That's what is important about Bond and that's what it is marketed on. We want to see it stay that way."

Mr Cox said the sale could be a precursor to the University of Queensland attempting to introduce undergraduate fees.

About 20 students held a banner outside the gates of the parliament annexe watched by a handful of police as the inquiry got under way.

Established by Bond Corporation and Japan's EIE group in 1989, Bond was Australia's first private university.

The buildings, campus and some other land were put out to tender after the financial collapse of EIE, which followed the earlier disintegration of the Bond empire.