



**National Tertiary  
Education Union**

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years  
1993-2013

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The Secretariat  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA, ACT 2610  
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Dear Secretariat,

**RE: Higher Education Support Amendment (Asian Century) Bill 2013**

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) supports the Federal government's introduction of the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Asian Century) Bill 2013*. NTEU believes that lifting engagement with the Asia-Pacific region is highly desirable, and that the proposed amendments represent a potentially important means of improving Australia's Asian 'literacy', a goal highlighted in the 2012 Ken Henry *Australia in the Asian Century* white paper.

Commensurable with the original rationale for OS-HELP, this would not only cultivate the capacity of individual undergraduates from a wide range of degree programs to learn about others in the Asia-Pacific region, but would encourage Australian universities to build both student exchange programs and other kinds of linkages and partnerships with Asia-Pacific universities. It is notable to recall that OS-HELP was introduced as part of a suite of income-contingent student loans that became the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) in 2005. At the time it was anticipated that the introduction of OS-HELP would benefit individual students as well as building Australia's national capacity for international engagement:

*Expanding Australian students' experiences of the social, economic and political systems of other countries is crucial in building both their individual capacity and Australia's national capacity to engage in the international market and establish relationships with people and organisations in other countries. Such skills are invaluable in terms of Australia's trade, foreign relations and security interests.*

Since this time, the introduction of the OS-HELP loan scheme has been credited with increasing the number of students undertaking an Australian degree program studying overseas, with a growth rate of around 10 per cent per.

The Bill is intended to broaden OS-HELP to give more students access to the loan scheme, with maximum loan amounts to be increased to \$7500 for students who wish to study in Asia, and to provide an additional \$1000 loan to pay for intensive Asian language training prior to study abroad in Asia. The NTEU believes that the \$1000 per student intended to assist students with intensive Asian language training should be a government grant so as not to add further to the debt burden of Asia-focused undergraduates.

There are important public interest reasons to ensure these kinds of regional engagements are provided the basis to flourish, and we support the government's efforts to increase Australia's Asian literacy through the passage of this Bill.

Yours sincerely,

JEANNIE REA

National President