

Additional Estimates 2014-15  
Education and Employment Committee

Document number: 3  
Date and time: 25/2 9:30AM

Tabled by: SENATOR CARR

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## Abbott government launches taxpayer-funded university advertising campaign

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Published: December 8, 2014 - 5:13PM

The Abbott government has launched a taxpayer-funded advertising campaign to address concerns about its proposed higher education changes.

The youth-focussed campaign, based on the theme "Your future is Australia's future", is aimed at countering claims about skyrocketing degree costs under a deregulated fee system.

The government has declined to provide an estimate of the cost of the campaign.

Prime time television advertisements launched on Sunday night, commercial radio advertisements have begun and full-page newspaper advertisements will follow over coming days. The campaign is expected to have a strong presence on social media sites such as Facebook. Bus shelter advertisements have begun.

The [campaign website](#) features a quiz asking respondents to select 'true' or 'false' to nine statements including: universities in rural and regional Australia will benefit from the changes; the government pays a big share of your higher education; and new scholarships will help students that really need it.

The government has proposed allowing universities to set their own fees, cutting course funding by 20 per cent and expanding federal funding to students at TAFES, private colleges and sub-bachelor degree programs.

The campaign assures students that they will not have to pay any fees upfront and will only have to start repaying their debts when they earn \$50,000.

The campaign says that the government will pay around 50 per cent of the cost of a degree under a deregulated system. It also says that students earn 75 per cent more on average over a lifetime than school leavers.

Following the [Senate defeat of the reforms](#) last week, Education Minister Christopher Pyne said independent senator John Madigan had requested a government-run education campaign to quell community concerns about the changes.

Senator Madigan reacted angrily, saying [he did not support a taxpayer-funded advertising campaign](#) on higher education reform and that he had not called for one.

Department of Education Secretary Lisa Paul signed a letter certifying the campaign complied with federal government guidelines on November 25.

Mr Pyne has refused to concede defeat after the Senate loss, reintroducing an amended bill the next day and saying it was "inevitable" that Parliament would eventually support them.

A spokesman for Mr Pyne said: "The information campaign will help to counter any myths and misconceptions about the current higher education system and raise awareness of HECS.

"It will provide prospective students with information to help guide their decisions relating to higher education ... This is a information campaign focusing on the facts."

The spokesman said Education Department officials who had attended university open days and career expos earlier this year had reported a consistent lack of understanding about Australia's higher education system, especially the status of HECS.

Commissioned market research backed up this anecdotal evidence.

The spokesman said the cost of the campaign would be released later, but it would cost less than Labor's campaigns when in office.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten said the campaign was "an absolute disgrace".

"Tony Abbott is spending taxpayers' money advertising his unfair plan for \$100,000 uni degrees – which has been rejected by the Parliament and the people," Mr Shorten said.

"No amount of slick advertising will make this look any better. It's the substance that's the problem, not the spin."

Palmer United Party Senate leader Glenn Lazarus said: "The Abbott government needs to cancel all advertising booked for this under-handed campaign and apologise to the people of Australia.

"On one hand, the Abbott government is telling us we are facing a budget emergency and on the other hand, they are engaging in an expensive propaganda campaign on radio and television to sell their dud reforms."

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*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/abbott-government-launches-taxpayerfunded-university-advertising-campaign-20141208-122epa.html>*