

Submission regarding Senate Inquiry into the Howard Government's Higher Education Package



Dear Senator Carr,

As a university student, I would like to write in strong opposition of the Howard Government's reform of higher education. Higher education under the previous Government was as fair and equitable as possible, with the HECS system balancing the need between equity of access to education and the private contribution any university graduate must make if he or she benefits from a tertiary degree.

Since the ascent of the Howard Government universities have had their necessary funding drained. Currently overcrowded classes, over stressed teachers and a lack of resources plague universities. To starve tertiary institutions as the Howard Government has done is unjust.

The majority of the reforms are abominable. Increasing of the number of full-fee paying places denies more deserving people the right to attend a tertiary institution, effectively giving their places to others with more money and lower marks. This will subsequently push the Tertiary Entrance Ranks for HECS places up even higher, forcing more people with marginally lower marks to pay for exorbitant full-fee places.

The allowing of Universities to charge 30% higher or lower for their courses is fraught with danger. As Universities remain under-funded, most will put their HECS fees up. The University of Sydney's subsequent raising of their HECS fees by the full 30% is proof of this.

The living allowances for poorer students is a travesty, four thousand dollars per year is not enough for the cost of average yearly rent and students need more than that to buy other necessities of life such as food, clothes and travel costs. More assistance to these people is vital.

The five year 'learning entitlement' means that the people wanting to complete post-graduate studies or students who change their mind over courses will be forced to pay fees, something that not all Australians can do.

I understand that higher education cannot be made free. Reforms by past Labor governments were progressive steps towards making higher education as accessible and sustainable as possible. However the reforms of the current Government are regressive steps towards concentrating access to education in the hands of the rich, denying working class youth their right to tertiary education and damaging universities in the long term.

I urge your party and members from other parties in the Committee to not only reject such disgusting changes but also to present alternatives to such reforms so that tertiary institutions are adequately resourced and staffed and that access to education is made as equitable as possible.

Yours truly,

James Rankin