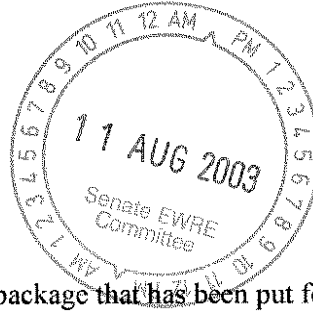


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Dear Senators,

I'm writing to you to express my dismay with the package that has been put forward by the government. I welcome the fact that the government has put higher education on the agenda, as I have experienced and seem many of the problems associated with attending a higher education institution. Yet this package will do little to help students and in many instances will have the opposite effect. It will make it harder if not impossible for many people to attend university.

My parents live in Alice Springs, and I had to move from there to attend university. I knew from year 12 that my parents would not be able to assist me in any way financially if I wished to attend university. Coming from a family of 6, it was just not possible with my parents' income and the huge burden of a home loan. I was therefore not able to attend uni straight away.

I took a year off from study and worked as hard as I ever have in my life working three jobs a week averaging 12 hours a day to save enough money. I eventually did, and qualified to be independent of my parents (whatever that means) in Centrelinks eyes, so that I was eligible to gain youth allowance. I was, however, not assisted in any way in moving to Adelaide. No easy or cheap task, especially with a monopoly in the air. I did not receive assistance from Centrelink until a substantial way into the first semester of my first year at university.

I decided to attend a university college, as I didn't know anyone in Adelaide and I could not afford a car, hence living in cheap accommodation in the suburbs was not an option. If you have any connection to colleges they are not cheap places to live. I started university living at a college, whose rent was more than the total amount of youth allowance I received including rent assistance. I still live in this college and was able to gain employment there, which subsidises my rent. I was incredibly fortunate, others have not been so and I have seen the effects first hand. I then had the additional costs of student services fee's (which although expensive I totally support what they provide), living expenses, textbooks etc. Many of these fees and the college related expenses had GST applied to them.

At no stage during my education have I felt that the government had even made remote attempts to make it a little easier for me. Someone who has had to travel inter-state to attend university, as well as being the first person in my family to have the opportunity to gain a HECS placement at university, or students more generally. I also received a quite respectable TER score of 87, and yet there were still many, many courses out of my reach. I feel there is much that could be done to make studying for a person from a working class background a little easier. Yet I rarely see this, instead I see the government making it easier for people from wealthier backgrounds to attend uni, in that if you can afford to pay your HECS upfront then you get a discount. In other words rich people get a cheaper degree than working class people. The inequalities are baffling. On top of the difficulties I have faced getting into university, I have also seen the effects of the under funding of universities. I have seen and talked to the underpaid and overworked academics. As a result I have had tutors needing to sleep between classes and getting essays back without adequate corrections and comments so that I can learn from mistakes, all because they are working ridiculous hours. I attend the tutorials every week where there aren't enough seats for students, and lectures where students have to sit in the isles because the uni doesn't have enough lecture halls and can't afford to run repeat lectures.

I hope you acknowledge that Australian universities are not at a crossroads but in a crisis as I do. I hope you realise that Australian universities need more money, and I have no problems with making a contribution to my education. After all, the community and nation will not be the only beneficiaries of my education. However, the levels that students currently pay, never mind a 30% increase is already deterring students from attending university. I thought long and hard about whether I wanted to go to uni and get into debt up to my eyeballs just like my parents with their mortgage. So did many of my friends and they decided it would take too long for them to get an education, and pay off that debt before they would reach the level they would get to if they just entered the workforce straight away.

My commitment to education was obviously stronger as I decided to attend university despite the hurdles. I cannot, however, emphasise the deterrent factor of a HECS debt, never mind a loan for an upfront degree with a real rate of interest. Many friends did not attend, and unfortunately were similarly not able to attend TAFE due to the massive up front fees. So now, when I talk to my friends back in Alice Springs I hear of the problems people face when the barriers to university were too great. Many of them have now caught themselves up with drugs, crime and other socially unacceptable behaviours. I feel incredibly sad when I think, what if they had had the opportunity to attend university, where would they be now? What if it was just a little easier? Please consider these questions when looking at the package.

The burden of debt is huge for students, it is a deterrent and the government realises this. Why else would they lower the cost of courses like nursing and teaching, but for no other reason than to encourage people to do those degrees, because they know people do not want to graduate and have a huge debt.

Having a debt now is bad enough but one that is 30% bigger with the increases in HECS fees or a substantially bigger debt if they are forced to take an interest loan would be substantially worse. The result of increasing debts will discourage people from attending our universities, and will force those who are committed enough to put off things like buying a house, or having children. Australia having some of the lowest fertility rates in the world do you think this package is going to help? I do not. If these reforms are implemented, and indeed if something is not done soon to help students and families lift the burden they are already carrying, we will not be sending out future generations into the world at an equal starting point. Those from wealth backgrounds will again be given one more unfair advantage. This package will not help us to attain a fair, equitable, just, or accessible higher education sector.

This package will take Australia backwards, not forwards and will put more burdens on students and their families. The package will not create the type of society I believe Australia wants, deserves or should be.

Senators I call on you with all my heart and mind to reject the government's package, and to help ease the burden Australian students and families are currently subjected to.

Yours in Education



David Pearson