

Proposed Changes to Higher Education: Get the Facts

Deregulation and \$100 000 degrees

- **Universities will be able to set their own fees (deregulation), and with NO LIMIT on what they can charge, fees are expected to skyrocket from 2016.**¹
- UWA has already said they will be charging \$16 000 per year per course² – to complete a Medicine degree will cost \$112 000.
- The government has proposed cuts to Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) by 20%, putting even more pressure on universities to increase fees.
- You will have to start paying your HECS back earlier – the HECS repayment threshold is being lowered by 10% to \$48 010 in today's terms.

Postgraduate students and research funding

- The government is cutting 10% - or \$173 million over 3 years – from the Research Training Scheme (RTS).
- It will then allow universities to charge fees for postgraduate research students (Masters and PhD) for the first time.
- The cost will be up to \$3900 per year for so-called high-cost courses and \$1900 a year of 'low-cost courses.'
- There will also be a cut of \$74.9 million over 3 years to the Australian Research Council, as well as a cut to CSIRO of \$111million over 4 years, resulting in hundreds of job losses and less opportunities for researchers.³

Public money to private, for-profit providers

- Funding will be given to private higher education providers for diplomas, advanced diplomas, associate degrees and bachelors degrees.
- Similar changes have recently taken place in the Victorian vocational education sector. Private providers used misleading advertising, including false promises of a guaranteed job. Quality declined and providers engaged in dodgy practices such as making courses 100% online, subcontracting delivery to non-registered providers, and letting students complete courses in less than a quarter of the normal duration.⁴
- They also had massive profit rates of around 30%.⁵
- While the government argues that quality won't decline, it is cutting funding to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) by around 40% or \$34million.⁶ We'll let you be the judge!

Commonwealth Scholarships?

- Funded from the increased tuition fee revenue, \$1 from every \$5 must go towards scholarships for disadvantaged students.
- The more disadvantaged students that attend a university, the thinner the 'scholarship' funds will be spread between them.

¹ For all budget higher education measures see 'Budget 2014': Higher Education, available online at budget.gov.au (accessed 12/02/2015).

² Ben Phillips and Stephen Parker, 'NATSEM: UWA model would lift uni debt for women, disadvantaged,' 29 September 2014, available online at <http://theconversation.com/natsem-uwa-model-would-lift-uni-debt-for-women-disadvantaged-32138> (accessed 18/02/2015).

³ For more information on the effect of the CSIRO funding cut see <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/sci-tech/sunday-explainer-longterm-effect-of-csiro-budget-cuts-20141220-12arim.html> (accessed 12/02/2015).

⁴ Serena Yu and Damian Oliver, 'The capture of public wealth by the for-profit VET sector,' Workplace Research Centre, University of Sydney Business School, January 2015, p. 5.

⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

⁶ Graham Hastings, National Union of Students Research Briefs, 2014 series, No. 3, May 2014, p. 2.

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- Education Minister Christopher Pyne has said that this will 'create Australia's biggest scholarship scheme.'⁷ Yet this would only be the case if universities carried out the biggest fee increases ever!
- This Scheme is structurally flawed, universities with the highest proportion of disadvantaged students cannot offer the same value or number of scholarships as universities with lower numbers of disadvantaged student.

Government lies

The government is spending \$15M on a misleading advertising campaign which is putting forward the following lies:

- *'The government will continue to pay a big share, around half, of your course fees.'*⁸

The government would only pay 50% of fees if universities ONLY increased fees by the minimum amount necessary to compensate for the 20% average government cut. There is no legislative requirement for them to do this. In UWA's Commerce course under deregulation the government will only be contributing slightly more than 10% of funding per place!⁹

- *'University graduates earn on average over 75% more than school leavers over their lifetime'*

According to the ABC, the real figure is closer to 30-40%.¹⁰ In addition, comparing university graduates to Year 12 school leavers with no other training is like comparing apples with oranges as many people will have some form of vocational training.

They also say their reforms make university MORE accessible. What a joke. \$100 000 degrees, a lifetime of debt and a two-tiered university system will make university less accessible for ordinary students.

What will Curtin University do if fees are deregulated?

- Vice-Chancellor Deborah Terry has said "Higher education is globally competitive and Australian universities need to be able to compete internationally."¹¹
- The Australian Technology Network of universities, of which Curtin University is a member, has 'cautiously expressed its support for fee deregulation.'¹²
- Curtin refused to freeze fees for 2015 and 2016 enrollees as did Murdoch and ECU.
- If deregulation passes it is likely that Curtin will sharply increase fees so as to better compete with UWA and other elite universities.¹³

⁷ Christopher Pyne, 'Great reform takes time – New higher education package to go to Senate,' Media release, December 2, 2014, <http://www.pyneonline.com.au/media/media-releases/great-reform-takes-time-new-higher-education-reform-package-to-go-to-senate> (accessed 18/02/2015).

⁸ This and the below quotations are all taken from the government website www.highered.gov.au (accessed 12/02/2015).

⁹ See for example: <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2014/dec/09/higher-education-ad-makes-demonstrably-untrue-claims-labor> (accessed 12/02/2015).

¹⁰ See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-29/pyne-graduate-earnings-and-unemployment-claim-overblown/5446462> (accessed 12/02/2015).

¹¹ 'Making a meal of fees protest,' Kalamunda Reporter, 1 July 2014.

¹² Graham Hastings, National Union of Students Research Briefs, 2014 series, No. 9, November 2014.

¹³ For more information see the Curtin Student Guild submission to the Australian Senate on the deregulation of higher education, September 2014, pp. 9-11. Prepared by Alexis Vassiley and Corrie Fillmore and presented by Sam Cavallaro and Miranda Wood. Available online at <http://www.guild.curtin.edu.au/Common/ContentWM.aspx?CID=1107> (accessed 12/02/2015)