

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES ACCORD: A SIGH OF RELIEF FOR STUDENTS

25/02/2024

The Accord recommendations calling for changes to course fees, debt repayment, financial support and student welfare have been welcomed by WA's largest student union.

Curtin Student Guild President Jasmyne Tweed said that the recommendations to implement paid placements was a vital step in addressing student poverty and one that the Curtin Student Guild had advocated for and was glad to see that the Guild achieved this win for students.

Many of the reforms advocated for by the Curtin Student Guild were addressed in the final report, including Jobs Ready Course fees, HECS-HELP debt repayments, financial support, Duty of Care and SSAF funding.

Jasmyne Tweed said that the Guild wanted more information about changes to the Jobs Ready Package that would base course fees on students' lifetime earnings and the recommendation to cap the indexation of outstanding HECS-HELP debts by pegging it to the Wage Price Index.

"We have to ensure students will be better off with these changes."

The introduction of a National Student Ombudsman and student charter would provide students with an independent dispute resolution process for complaints.

"This is a good first step in protecting the rights of students and will allow students to raise complaints about student safety and wellbeing on their campuses," said Ms Tweed.

Ms Tweed said that the Guild welcomed the recommendation that banks not include HECS-HELP debts on loan applications and that repayments be deducted from their debt before indexation.

The Curtin Student Guild President said that the research recommendations were positive, especially increasing minimum stipend rates and making part-time scholarships tax-free.

Despite recognising the need for well-funded student unions, Ms Tweed noted that the report did not include a recommended minimum amount that student organisations should receive from Student Services and Amenities Fee.

"Student money should be in students' hands and the only way that can be achieved is by student unions receiving 100% of the Student Services and Amenities Fees," said Ms Tweed.

Jasmyne Tweed said that while the report highlighted the financial hardship facing many students and recommended some changes, which was welcomed, it did not address the issue of lowering the age of financial independence from 22 to 18 at which all students could access Government financial support.

According to Ms Tweed this was a necessary reform and a missed opportunity.

Ms Tweed said the Job Broker recommendation reinforced the fact that more students were increasingly having to work part-time and slow down their degrees.

“This is not something the government should be accepting and embracing; it is a symptom of our inequitable economy, the cost of living and the fact that students have been exploited historically through unfair student contributions to their education fees, unpaid mandatory placements, and exorbitant taxes on their HECS debts.

“The Jobs Broker is a token solution to a systematic problem,” she said.

The Curtin Student Guild President said that there could have been more focus on international student fees, welfare and recommendations for migration assistance.

Ms Tweed noted the Accord panel’s emphasis on enhanced First Nations opportunities for students and university employees, and believed this focus should be continued in the implementation of the recommendations.

She noted that Curtin Student Guild was the only student-led organisation that submitted at every stage in the Accord process and that many student concerns that we raised were being taken seriously.

There were still many crucial areas the Accord recommendations have not been resolved including the specifics of SSAF allocation, the exploitation of international students and addressing the specific needs of under-represented student demographics.

“However, what is recommended will alleviate many of the immediate stressors facing many students.”

The Curtin Student Guild calls on Minister Jason Clare and Australian Universities to act on resolving these issues as a part of this reform and commit to these recommendations.

“We will be advocating that the positive outcomes of the recommendations are committed to in full by the Australian Government,” said Ms Tweed.

The Curtin Student Guilds previous submissions to the Universities Accord process can be found [here](#).

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