

# Tertiary Fees

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## AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN TERTIARY FEES EDUCATION

*Higher education is an investment not a cost. It results in significant public benefits. Universal access to publicly funded higher education is crucial to overcome systemic disadvantage, maximise potential to fully participate in the community and provide the future professionals Australia needs.*

*“The Democrats will continue to fight against the Howard Government’s reforms – reforms that have seen students charged fees equivalent to a small mortgage.”*

**Senator  
Natasha Stott Despoja  
Spokesperson on  
Higher Education**

The Democrats have voted against all attempts to introduce and increase fees and charges for education. We opposed the introduction of the Higher Education Administration Charge (HEAC) in 1986, the introduction of HECS in 1988 and the increases in HECS and domestic undergraduate full-fee (DUFF) places in the Howard Government’s Backing Australia’s Future policy.

Other changes opposed by the Democrats include:

- Deregulation of the postgraduate sector to enable institutions to charge up front fees for postgraduate courses;
- The systemic cost shifting to students for essential course materials and academic services including internet access, lecture notes, student guides and photocopying,;
- The abolition of the Educational Textbook Subsidy Scheme; and
- The removal of the cap on the proportion of places in a course that can be offered to full-fee paying students.

## Our Action Plan

- Abolish full-fee degrees for domestic undergraduates.
- Move to abolish financial barriers to higher education such as HECS, and immediately increase the HECS repayment threshold to average male earnings.
- Increase the number of funded places to the postgraduate sector with the aim of abolishing postgraduate up-front fees, particularly in disciplines with little or no private benefit but considerable public benefit, such as teaching, nursing, science and agriculture.
- Introduce additional student income support measures (*see also Higher Education Action Plan*).



Other ACTION PLANS are available online at  
[www.democrats.org.au](http://www.democrats.org.au)

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## The Issues

On 19 October 1999, Prime Minister John Howard said:

*“We have taken a decision yesterday that was reported to this Parliament, and I think widely welcomed throughout the Australian community, to maintain the existing higher education system. We have no intention of deregulating university fees. We have no intention of altering the current HECS arrangement.”*

Two days later on radio, the Prime Minister stated his position was clear – he would not alter the present system, HECS would be maintained, he would not introduce \$100 000 fees. Alas, this must have been another of Prime Minister Howard's 'non-core' promises, because the Government did indeed allow the introduction of full-fee places for domestic students.

There are now 111 degrees that cost over \$100 000, with some costing almost \$240 000. The number of domestic students paying full-fee degrees almost doubled between 2005 and 2006. If John Howard is re-elected, how much higher will university fees go?

Students in HECS-HELP places are far from immune from fee increases. In the last Budget alone, students in accounting, administration, economics, and commerce were effectively hit with a \$1029 increase at the same time that the accounting industry is experiencing a skills shortage.

The Universities Australia report, *Australian University Student Finances 2006* – compiled following a survey of almost 19 000 students – paints a bleak picture of just how financially stressed our tertiary students are following 11 years of Howard Government fee increases.

It showed that one in eight students regularly go without food or other necessities because they cannot afford them. Over 40 percent of full-time undergraduates and over 50 percent of part-time undergraduates claimed that their need to work was having an adverse effect on their studies. Almost 24 percent of full-time undergraduate students and 37.4 percent of part-time undergraduates regularly missed classes because they needed to work.

The Howard Government has lost the plot on higher education. In their ideological drive to minimise the impact of higher education on the Government's financial bottom line, they are progressively heaping the burden on to universities and students.

If students are missing classes because they have to work or going without food because they cannot afford it, then the quality of their education is suffering. How is that in either the individual or the national interest? The Democrats will continue to fight for higher education to be accessible and affordable for all.



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