

Access to publicly-funded education is crucial to overcoming systemic disadvantage. Education is a life-long process that should foster individual initiative, creativity and flexibility, and allow all Australians to maximise their potential.

The Rudd/Gillard Government has to some extent redressed the Howard Government funding cuts however student services remain limited and big gaps in access remain for disadvantaged groups.

Rural students are only 2/3rds as likely to go to university as their metro peers. This has serious consequences for the rural workforce in health and education and in building the economies of regions. Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities and those from low income families are also very under-represented in the tertiary sector.

A 2006 study found that 85% of students are working on average 15 hours a week with substantial numbers working much more. Rural students have higher accommodation and transport costs and people with disabilities rarely have their support needs met. Whilst the Labor Government has relaxed the parental income test, its changes to student income support overall are cost neutral.

The collapse of numerous colleges for international students has had disastrous consequences for Australia's reputation as an education provider and for those students. Despite complaining about inadequate regulation in Opposition, Labor had done little in office to fix the problems.

Our Plan

- Peg student income support measures, including **Austudy and Youth Allowance** to the Henderson Poverty Line and lower the age of independence for students to 18 years.
- Make all Commonwealth higher education **scholarships** tax free and abolish the distinction between Commonwealth Learning Scholarships and university scholarships by establishing a new class of scholarship that is exempt from the social security personal income test
- Increase the **HECS** repayment threshold to average male earnings and use HECS relief to encourage disadvantaged students to apply for places
- Fund universities and TAFE institutes to meet targets of at least a 25% increase in rural campus and other **under-represented, disadvantaged group places**
- Reshape the Education **Infrastructure** Fund to deliver better economic and social outcomes in poorer areas of rural Australia
- Increase the loading on **rural university and TAFE** campuses to cover the additional operational costs of distance
- Provide a **Tertiary Access Allowance** for students receiving Youth Allowance and Austudy who are required to move from home to access tertiary education
- Provide packages of support for students with **disabilities** including assistive technology for people who are blind, deaf blind or have low vision
- Set targets and provide capital works funding for universities to develop more affordable rental **accommodation** for students
- Support TAFE Institutes being provided with Commonwealth **Supported Places** for skills shortage occupation 4-year degree courses
- Adopt the Baird Review recommendations to improve **international student** complaint systems, tighten agent practices and registration of new providers