

EDUCATION

Greens

The Greens believe that a strong public education system is the key to creating a fair, successful and cohesive society. Everyone has the right to free, high-quality public education and training.

The Greens will:

- Increase funding for all levels of public education, including TAFE and university
- Fund at least two years of public preschool education for all Australian children
- Freeze current private school funding and review current inequitable arrangements to prioritise public education.

Socialist Equality

The SEP demands that billions of dollars be poured into education to ensure free, high quality public education, including child care and kindergarten for all. Every student must have the capacity to fully develop his or her talents and capabilities. The SEP opposes voluntary student unionism, and insists on the right of all students to access free tertiary education, along with the full range of cultural, intellectual, recreational and sporting activities that are critical to campus life.

The SEP proposes a vast expansion in apprenticeships and free higher education for all who wish to pursue it, including overseas students.

HECS debts, which now total some \$18 billion, must be cancelled and tertiary students should automatically receive a living wage.

Socialist Alliance

We believe education is a right not a privilege, yet private schools now get more federal funding than the entire public university sector. We are for free education, which means the abolition of HECS and Full Fee Paying places (both domestic and international), which could easily be achieved by diverting money going to private schools and the massive "Defence" Budget the Howard Government has developed since 1996.

Coalition

Further Education

The Coalition Government has provided a 24 fold increase in funding of technical and vocational training in the last 10 years to a total of \$24 billion, from \$1 billion in 1996.

Part of this funding has been for the establishment of Australian Technical Colleges, which were announced at the 2004 election. There has been a revival in public interest in technical and vocational education. These colleges, which allow year 11 and 12 students to commence a schools-based apprenticeship while completing their Year 12 certificate, offer an innovative pathway to a trade career. The Coalition Government is investing \$530.9 million to establish 28 of these colleges around the country. By 2009, these colleges will be providing vocational and technical education to between 8,000 and 10,000 students.

In addition to this, more than 400,000 young people are receiving valuable skills and training through the Australian Apprenticeship Programme — an increase of almost 160% since 1996.

Our Universities

For those school students moving into the university system, the future quality of the education they receive has been further assured by the Coalition Government's creation of the Higher Education Endowment Fund (HEEF). As a result of the Coalition's 11 years of strong economic management, we have been able to invest a record \$6 billion to establish the HEEF which will provide ongoing support to our universities for capital works and research facilities.

This is part of the \$7.9 billion additional investment the Coalition has made in higher education this year. It also brings to \$8.8 billion the amount the Australian Government will invest in our universities this financial year, a 31 per cent real increase on the Australian Government's investment in 1995-96.

The Australian Government provides 56 per cent of the university sector's revenue and the overall financial health of the sector is strong:

- • University revenue has almost doubled since 1996 to S 15.5 billion in 2006
- • The sector's combined operating surplus stands at \$1.3 billion (up 51 per cent on 2005)
- • Total sector net assets are \$28.5 billion (up 11 per cent on 2005)
- • Cash and investments are \$7.9 billion (up 12.5 per cent on 2005)

There are almost 1 million students at Australian universities, including 61,000 more taxpayer-supported undergraduate places this year than there were in 1995.

The Australian Government is providing an additional 50,000 Commonwealth-supported places between 2004 and 2011 and the Budget decision of the Australian Government to fund over-enrolments up to 5 per cent will potentially create up to a further 21,000 Commonwealth-supported places next year. This is many thousands more than the number of eligible students Universities Australia estimates missed out on a university place this year.

97.5 per cent of all domestic undergraduate students in public universities are in Commonwealth-supported places. 91.4 per cent of all school leavers who applied for a university place received an offer in their home state.

The median starting salary for graduates is \$40,800 and many earn much more. A student does not have to begin repaying their taxpayer-funded loan until they start earning \$39,825 and then never pay more than 8 per cent of their salary per year.

The Coalition provided an additional \$222 million in this year's Budget for additional scholarships and other support for students. Each year, the Australian Government provides around \$2 billion to full-time students in receipt of youth allowance, Austudy and Abstudy payments. The Australian Government's support for students as a proportion of GDP is well above the OECD average (0.37 per cent vs the OECD average of 0.26 per cent).

Australia performs ahead of the pack when it comes to access to tertiary education. 32 per cent of Australians aged 25-64 years have a tertiary qualification compared to the OECD country mean of 26 per cent and 35 per cent of 19 year-olds are in tertiary education, above the OECD average of 29 per cent. Australia is also the top-ranked country in the OECD for the proportion of students entering, and graduating from, university.

The Coalition is driving reform that will produce a higher quality, more diverse and more responsive higher education sector.

Labor

The Labor Party did not provide a response for this forum. Policy information has been collated from the ALP website www.alp.org.au

As a growing body of evidence shows, long-term social and economic outcomes are significantly influenced by the investment that nations make in the education and training of their people. On measures of pre-school, school, vocational and tertiary education and research, Australia has fallen well behind its competitors. Labor believes we need an education revolution. We must lift the quantity of investment in education and the quality of education outcomes. We cannot afford to waste the talent and potential of any Australian. We must set for ourselves a new national vision—for Australia to become the most educated country, the most skilled economy and the best trained workforce in the world.

Poverty remains the greatest indicator of disadvantage and the single most important barrier to educational success. Schools that serve communities with many low income families need specialised support for teachers, student counselling and community liaison, and additional resources to provide that support. Labor will establish an innovative system of targeted resource provision to schools with concentrations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their participation in schooling and their educational outcomes.

All children have the right to high quality education so that they can live fulfilling and rewarding lives. It is the responsibility of government to protect that right.

This responsibility entails investment in raising standards at all levels of education. It includes guaranteeing that all Australians have access to the full range of learning outcomes so that students and trainees can fully develop their capabilities, as well as the intellectual and social skills they need to gain the maximum benefit from citizenship.

Government also has a responsibility to ensure that there is fairness in the allocation of education resources to monitor educational outcomes. This monitoring should identify where action may be needed to improve opportunities for particular student populations and to guard against unjustifiable forms of inequality and discrimination. Equity principles will guide Labor's priorities for the funding, planning and delivery of education for all our children and young people.

Much more needs to be done to improve participation and retention of Indigenous children in education at all levels. This must involve:

- focusing on literacy and numeracy in Indigenous education;
- working with communities to lift school attendance rates;
- involving Indigenous families in schools and decision making processes;
- employing more Indigenous teachers and other education workers;
- encouraging greater participation by Indigenous children in pre-schooling; and
- providing culturally appropriate and relevant learning experiences, including Indigenous languages.

Good teaching is at the heart of successful learning. Government has a clear responsibility to ensure that all students have access to quality teaching. Labor will give priority to this imperative in collaboration with State and Territory governments, education authorities and the teaching profession, to ensure that ongoing professional development for teachers will be enhanced.

Education systems need support so that they can meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century. Labor will support the strategic development of information and communication technologies for the benefit of all, to avoid our education systems contributing to the widening of the gap between the information rich and the information poor. Labor will develop a national strategy in cooperation with the States and Territories and with non-government authorities to ensure that all children and young people have access to information and communications technologies. We will also work with education professionals to develop effective and innovative strategies for the use of those technologies in education and training.

Detail of Labor's education platform is at http://www.alp.org.au/platform/chapter_04.php

Christian Democrats

Governments need to maintain a fair and equitable funding system between private and public schools. An independent evaluation review of the current funding system is needed to answer current criticisms on the allocation of funding to schools.

CDP is committed to the improvement of indigenous educational outcomes and will press for substantial improvement in the educational achievement of indigenous Australians including the need for academic scholarships for Aboriginal and low socio-economic families.

Governments should invest in the research and development of effective educational partnerships between home, school and community as one of the national priorities in education.

Expanding the number of training opportunities for young people and the provision of additional funding for new apprenticeships and work programs are important objectives for CDP.

Extra support and remuneration should be given to teachers and administrators in rural areas and in districts where teaching conditions are more challenging.

Australian Democrats

The Democrats would boost base funding to universities, primarily by revising the formula that the Government uses to index grants to universities to account for inflation. The current formula is inadequate and has led to an estimated \$1.5 billion shortfall in university funding. We change this formula to more accurately account for inflation, and we would provide a one-off grant to universities to make up for the years of lost funding.

We would also 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. The Democrats would also introduce additional student income support measures.

More detailed information on our extensive higher education policy can be found here http://www.democrats.org.au/docs/ActionPlans/HigherEducation_2007.pdf