



Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
the council of Australia's university presidents

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Invest in students now: long term benefits for the nation

Vice-Chancellors of Australia's universities yesterday considered the findings of the *Australian University Student Finances 2006* report released last week identifying a number of key recommendations it will be taking to Government that will help assist students during their time of study.

Chair of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) Survey Steering Group and Vice-Chancellor of The University of Western Australia, Professor Alan Robson said a number of recommendations will be taken to Government that will greatly assist the current circumstances of students and ensure optimal educational outcomes.

In the short-term the AVCC will seek:

- a removal of the assessable income component for all Government scholarships;
- an increase in the number of Government scholarships available to all eligible undergraduate and postgraduate students;
- an increase in the level of Youth Allowance by 25% for university students over 18 years of age not living at home;
- the extension of Youth Allowance to enable access for postgraduate students;
- extension of Youth Allowance to students from regions where exceptional circumstances in relation to the drought has been declared;
- a specific-purpose payment for all enrolled Indigenous students to access educational material such as textbooks and transportation, and childcare;
- the introduction of a *Going to Uni Transport Pass* limited for use during semester, with the same cost structure and administration as now apply to school students however, administered by the Australian Government;
- the implementation of a set of interest free loans to assist students with the cost of living; and
- a change to the access criteria for rent assistance from only those who receive the away from home rate of Youth Allowance to all students regardless of location.

Professor Alan Robson said that in the longer-term there is a need for Government to conduct a comprehensive review of the current student income support arrangements, incorporating a full examination of the eligibility criteria supporting Youth Allowance with particular reference to reducing the age of independence from the current 25 years to 18.

"Universities and industry need to be encouraged to increase the number of scholarships available and the AVCC will look at ways this can be done, one possible option is to change the existing taxation arrangements on scholarships so that they do not count towards income," Professor Robson said.

"We also need to encourage business and industry to establish student working placements in their field of study between semester time and one way for this to occur is for Government to change existing taxation arrangements.

"This would provide students with gainful employment in their field, and provide employers with a larger pool of employees during a time of skills crisis in Australia.

"The findings from the survey indicate that on balance students are worse off today in financial terms than in 2000, especially full-time undergraduate students, which is adversely affecting their capacity to study effectively.

"The AVCC will use the findings of the 2006 survey and the key recommendations towards ensuring students have appropriate student income support during their time of study," Professor Robson said.

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