


Anthony Albanese facing a fight on university fees rejig

EXCLUSIVE

By RHIANNON DOWN
REPORTER

7:23PM JANUARY 30, 2024 •  26 COMMENTS

Anthony Albanese has been warned he is in for a political fight if he makes nurses and teachers pay more for their university degrees to alleviate fees for arts students, amid expectations the federal government is preparing to overhaul the funding of the higher education sector.

Higher education expert Andrew Norton said the university sector's push for student contributions to be the same for every degree could nearly double costs for nursing and teaching students while putting more pressure on the federal budget.

The Morrison government in 2020 reformed university funding to encourage students to study in sectors where there is a high demand for workers, under its Job Ready Graduates model.

This involved decreasing the cost of degrees in teaching, nursing, agriculture and mathematics, while more than doubling student contributions for humanities subjects.

Before 2020, student contributions varied across disciplines and were loosely based on expected earning potential in the workforce, with law degrees being more expensive than nursing and arts courses.

The model was implemented under John Howard in 1996 with the aim of reducing the government's cost and increasing the amount paid by students, replacing the flat-rate fee system which had been in place.

The sector expects Education Minister Jason Clare to reform student contributions, after a review panel wrote in its interim report that JRG “needs to be redesigned before it causes long-term damage” to the sector.

Professor Norton, from the Australian National University, said the government should move back to the “private benefits model”, where fees are based on the future earning potential. However, Professor Norton said this model would likely also increase student contributions for nurses and teachers.

“My argument is to go back to the previous system that was very roughly linked to private benefits. If you're in a degree that typically leads to higher earnings, you paid a relatively high rate, or corresponding low earnings, a low rate,” Professor Norton said.

“And so some version of that, in my view, is the best system we could devise.

“But it will be costly and politically difficult to move from here to there, and the reason for that is that it'll probably mean that people doing teaching and nursing would have to pay more than they do now, which has obvious political drawbacks.”

Under the current system, students in education, nursing, maths and foreign languages pay \$4445 a year, engineering, health, computing and visual art students pay \$8948 per year and law, commerce, communications, society and culture students contribute \$16,323 per year. Medicine, dentistry and veterinary science students pay a different rate at \$12,720 a year.

Reducing fees for arts, humanities, communications and culture degrees could cost as much as \$1bn a year, according to Department of Education estimates in the [Universities Accord interim report](#), posing a significant hit to the budget if the cost isn't offset by increasing other degrees.

Group of Eight CEO Vicki Thomson has advocated for the student contribution to be the same for every degree. “The Go8 recommended the (Morrison government's reforms) be abolished in favour of a simpler model for university teaching funding

by having a fixed student contribution and a commonwealth contribution to reflect the variability of qualification costs,” she said.

RHIANNON DOWN, REPORTER

Rhiannon Down is a political reporter in The Australian’s Canberra bureau. She began her career at the paper in the Sydney bureau, where she covered mostly courts and crime, after joining the newspaper as a cadet... [Read more](#)



Topics

[Anthony Albanese](#)

TRENDING

Ford’s festival role challenged over doxxing of Jewish Australians

By ALEXI DEMETRIADI



‘Coal plants perfect for reactors’

By GEOFF CHAMBERS



‘Embarrassing’ offshore wind paper pulled

By RACHEL BAXENDALE



Opponents ‘out to get’ UNRWA

By BEN PACKHAM, ALEXI DEMETRIADI



NZ usurped as the No.1 Aussie destination

By ROBYN IRONSIDE



‘Albanese should keep wedding discreet, modest’: strategists

By ROSIE LEWIS



SPONSORED CONTENT