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NTEU Submission

to the

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee

Inquiry into Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009

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Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: NTEU strongly recommends that the increase to the income threshold before penalty is phased in from 1 July 2011 as originally proposed.

Recommendation 2: NTEU strongly recommends that the increase to the “banked” credit in the Student Income Bank threshold be from 1 July 2011.

Recommendation 3: That the proposed legislation be amended to include a review clause to ascertain the impact of the changes to student income support on participation rates of regional and rural and Indigenous students. The review should be conducted in the first half of 2014.

Recommendation 4: That for ‘dependent’ young people from rural and regional areas the Parental Income Means Test thresholds for Youth Allowance should be revised up by 50% so that it rises from the current level of approximately \$44,000 to \$66,000.

Recommendation 5: Classify all Indigenous students enrolled in enabling courses offered by Australian universities as Tertiary students for the purposes calculating their ABSTUDY Entitlements.

Recommendation 6: Provide Indigenous Students enrolled in enabling courses at Australian universities access to Commonwealth Learning Scholarships (CLS).

Recommendation 7: Classifying all Indigenous students studying at university (including students enrolled in enabling courses) as being Independent for the purposes of ABSTUDY.

Introduction

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) represents approximately 26,000 staff employed in Australia's higher education industry. The Union welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee in relation to the Inquiry into the *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009*.

NTEU understands that the changes the Bill proposes to make will have wide-ranging impact on income support arrangements for students. Overall, the Union is supportive of these changes, noting that they have been made in response to a number of recommendations arising from the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education.

The NTEU supports the rationale of the proposed changes to the student income support measures in so far as they are aimed at ensuring student income support is better targeted and goes to those students and families who most need them. However, we believe that certain aspects of the Bill could be further improved. In order to ensure that student income support is even better targeted, special provisions need to be made for the most disadvantaged students – that is those from rural and regional Australia and in particular Indigenous students.

Part 1: Proposed Amendments to Student Income Support Legislation

NTEU expresses support for the following aspects of the proposed legislation:

Change to work criteria leading to qualification for Independent Youth Allowance

NTEU had previously expressed concern that the initial changes to the criteria for qualification for independence (announced as part of the 2009/10 Budget) through part-time employment or wages could adversely affect as many as 30,000 rural and regional students who, in good faith, had committed to a 'gap year' in 2009 in order to qualify for independent status under the old rules. We are therefore supportive of the change in the proposed legislation that recognises the predicament of these students and phases in the new rules for the qualification of independent status over three years.

We also note that change in the thresholds for dependence means that many more students will subsequently qualify for Dependent Youth Allowance under the new parental income test, and that in theory, this change will equally benefit all student cohorts. However, as noted above, we are concerned that this may not be the case for many regional, rural and Indigenous students and the goal of increased participation of these students may not be realised (see Section 2 of this submission and accompanying recommendations).

Change to the age of independence

Under the new student income support arrangements, young income support recipients will automatically be considered independent if they are aged 24 years in 2010, 23 years in 2011 and 22 years from 2012 onwards. The Union notes that these changes are expected to

benefit around 24,000 new and existing recipients over the next four years. While NTEU supports the recommendation of the National Union of Students (NUS) that the age of independence be 18 years, nonetheless this is a positive step to achieving that long term goal.

Change to the Youth Allowance threshold and income test

NTEU has supported previous calls by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Council of Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) for the Youth Allowance threshold of earned income before penalty to be raised, to match CPI, from \$6000 to at least \$8000. The Union notes that under current arrangements, personal income above \$236 per fortnight (\$6136 per year) results in 50 cents in the dollar being deducted from Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY payments, and amounts earned over \$316 result in 60 cents in the dollar being deducted.

The proposed legislation will result in the amount a student may earn before their student income support is deducted being almost doubled, from \$236 per fortnight to \$400 per fortnight (\$10,400 per year), commencing from 1 July 2012. This change will enable students to earn significantly more from work to supplement their Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY payments, and is supported by the Union. However, the Union opposes the delay in the commencement of this provision as proposed in this amendment, given that the purpose of the changes made to the test of independence was to ensure students undertaking a gap year in 2009 would not be disadvantaged.

Recommendation 1: NTEU strongly recommends that the increase to the income threshold before penalty is phased in from 1 July 2011 as originally proposed.

NTEU supports the changes to the level of 'banked' credit in the Student Income Bank from \$6,000 to \$10,000 (maximum). However, for the same reasons that we argue against the delay in introducing the changes to the income support threshold, we also oppose the delay in the introduction of increases in the level of 'bankable income' (set for introduction in July 2012), and instead strongly recommend that it also be introduced for 1 July 2011.

Recommendation 2: NTEU strongly recommends that the increase to the "banked" credit in the Student Income Bank threshold be from 1 July 2011.

Student scholarships – new scholarships and exclusion of non-Government scholarships from income assessment

The Union notes that previously only Government scholarships were excluded from assessment as income when evaluating eligibility for income support. We support the proposed change (commencing 1 January 2010) that will see all privately funded equity or merit based scholarships excluded as assessable income until reaching the value of \$6702 (this threshold will be increased yearly), and will apply to Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY and AUSTUDY.

The Union is also supportive of the provision of new scholarships for students, although we do note that these are replacing other current scholarships (the new Start-Up Scholarships (\$2,254 per year) replace the current Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships and the

new Relocation Scholarships (\$4,000 in Year 1 and \$1,000 per subsequent year) replace the current Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships).

Part 2: Issues for Further Consideration

While the Union is in support of the majority of the changes proposed by this Bill, we are concerned that these measures will fall short of what is needed to substantially increase participation rates of students from regional and rural areas as well as those from Indigenous backgrounds. NTEU therefore recommends that the proposed legislation include a clause for the review of the impact of these changes on the participation of these students after an appropriate period.

Recommendation 3: That the proposed legislation be amended to include a review clause to ascertain the impact of the changes to student income support on participation rates of regional and rural and Indigenous students. The review should be conducted in the first half of 2014.

NTEU believes this to be important in light of the arguments outlined below:

Regional and Rural Students

Despite a number of changes implemented over the last ten years, access to higher education for many regional and rural young students remains problematic. The critical issues for young people from rural and regional areas around the student income support reforms relates to:

- (1) The costs of moving away from the parental home to another part of Australia and the high costs of moving which cannot always be supported by parents;
- (2) The relative economic disadvantage of rural and regional areas in Australia;
- (3) The lower participation rate of youth in tertiary education from youth of rural and regional backgrounds; and
- (4) How these issues are best progressed in light of the Federal government's social inclusion agenda for higher education.

NTEU believes that unless further incentives are created specifically targeting regional and rural students, the Government's goal of increasing university participation amongst this cohort may be at risk.

Michael Klapdor and Dr Matthew Thomas in their analysis of the *Budget Measures* student income support reforms commented;¹

There is, however, a large pool of students from middle income families who will be negatively affected by the independence requirements. The measure will affect this group in terms of their ability to demonstrate independence from their families, their freedom to move away from home in order to study

¹ M. Klapdor and M. Thomas, 'Student Income Support,' *Budget Review 2009–10*, 29, 33 (2008–09): pg. 183

the course of their choice and their being forced to compete in the job market so as to qualify as independent for the purposes of income support, when they decide to study. (pg 183)

The significant lower participation rate of young people from rural and regional areas in universities raises a host of further issues around the specific disadvantage experienced in rural and regional Australia, and in particular concern that student income support reform may make participation in tertiary education highly difficult for young people from rural and regional middle income families.

Research into regional and rural communities has found that most students aspire to some form of further education when they finish school and were generally well-informed about post-school education options, including articulated pathways.² This and similar research also found that the more vulnerable the local economy the more resolute students were that they would leave to escape what they saw as unpromising and untenable futures; one study of young peoples' perceptions of opportunities in rural communities found that between 70% and 95% of young people interviewed planned to leave their small towns, with more females than males intending to move elsewhere.³

However, the ability of these students to take a pathway that led them to their aspirations is not always clear cut, with non metropolitan students and their communities identifying a number of disincentives to tertiary education. Unless the community has access to a local regional institution or campus that offers a broad range of undergraduate courses, it is likely that students will be required to leave their communities in order to access higher education opportunities. For many regional and rural students the requirement to relocate can impose a number of problems for students and their families, which can act as a deterrent to university education. Of these disincentives, the perceived costs of relocation, study and the requirement of living independently is of considerable concern to both students and parents.

Directly related to this is the fact that households in non-capital areas have lower levels of gross income, with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (see Table 1) confirming that, on average, the levels for households in non-capital cities are 25% below that of the capital cities.⁴ Lower levels of household income mean that non-capital city households also have lower levels of accumulated wealth than their capital city counterparts, with data showing that in 2005-2006 the net worth of non-capital city households were \$50,000 less than their capital city counterparts.⁵ As a result, non-capital city households are likely to have less discretionary income and accumulated saving and wealth than capital city households.

² N. Alloway, P. Gilbert, R. Gilbert and S. Muspratt (2004) *Factors Impacting on Student Aspirations and Expectations in Regional Australia*, Higher Education Group Evaluations and Investigations Programme, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra.

³ M. Alston & J. Kent (2001) *Young, Rural and Looking for Work*, Centre for Rural Social research, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2009) *No 6523.0 Household Income and Income Distribution, Australia, 2007 – 2008*, pg 10

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *No. 6554.0 Household Wealth and Wealth Distribution, Australia, 2005-06* (Tables 25 and 27)

Lower income levels and lower levels of accumulated wealth mean that such city households have less discretionary income and/or assets with which to finance the additional costs of sending their children to university, especially where they are required to leave home to do so. Therefore while the changes to the income test introduced will ensure more non-capital city households qualify to receive student income support, it will not overcome the problems of many households who do not have the financial capacity (as measured by net worth) to send their children away to study at university.

Median Income Weekly Income 2007-08

	NSW	VIC	Qld	SA	WA	TAS	ACT	AUSTRALIA
Capital City								
Gross	1435	1383	1492	1125	1438	1071	1762	1410
Disposable	737	713	754	682	763	659	939	734
Disposable %	51%	52%	51%	61%	53%	62%	53%	52%
Balance of State								
Gross	1041	1036	1177	860	1250	938	n.a	1076
Disposable	613	593	645	583	702	531	n.a	627
Disposable %	59%	57%	55%	68%	56%	57%	na.	58%
Balance / Cap City %								
Gross	73%	75%	79%	76%	87%	88%	n.a	76%
Disposable	83%	83%	86%	85%	92%	81%	n.a	85%

Source: ABS No. 6523.0 *Household Disposable Income and Income Distribution Australia 2007-2008* p 10

In addition to lower levels of income and net worth for non-capital city households, it should be noted that the economic pressures (exacerbated by distances, isolation and the lack of services and infrastructure) for those residing in many regional and rural areas are significant,⁶ and of particular concern for those rural and regional students whose family income has suffered from the effects of the drought and more limited job opportunities. This economic pressure can be seen in a 2007 debt survey that showed that regional Australia had the highest average defaults. The survey noted that nationwide, regional NSW had the highest increase in percentage defaults (an increase of 60% in Full Year 2007 compared to Full Year 2006), followed by increases in regional Victoria (52%) regional QLD (42%) and regional South Australia (40%) respectively.⁷

Confirming this concern is the fact that the majority of students interviewed as part of a 2007 DEST study reported their belief that financial considerations might hinder their aspirations.⁸ The study found that for most of the students and their parents interviewed, the likely cost involved, especially where students must leave town to pursue higher levels of education and training, caused persistent anxiety:

⁶ This pressure is documented by research conducted by McManus and Pritchard (2001) in *Land of discontent: the dynamics of change in rural and regional Australia* which demonstrated the uneven distribution of income and wealth between the capital cities and rural places, including the statistic that the 10 highest income regions are urban while the 10 poorest are in rural areas. They attributed this differential to the combined effects of global competition and the rationalisation of services.

⁷ *Defaults rise dramatically across regional Australia* VEDA media release, 30 October 2007. Online ref: <http://www.vedaadvantage.com/news-and-media/article.dot?id=506744>

⁸ Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert and Muspratt (2004) *Factors Impacting on Student Aspirations and Expectations in Regional Australia*. Idem.

The final reality for students was the realisation that fulfilment of their aspirations and expectations was bound inevitably to their capacity to finance them. (p 262)

NTEU believes that in relation to students from regional and rural backgrounds, further changes could be provided to offset costs faced by these students and families. It is the opinion of the NTEU that changes to student income support must specifically target the participation of young people from rural and regional backgrounds in the higher education sector.

There are a number of alternatives that the Government might consider in redressing the higher financial costs and barriers that regional students face in participating in higher education. However, in relation to the proposed legislation, the Union notes the increase in the level of the annual Parental Income Test threshold for dependent Youth Allowance recipients from \$32,800 to \$44,165 per year. In recognition of the issues outlined in this submission, we believe that for regional and rural students a higher rate is justified. An increase of up to 50% would take the current income threshold level from approximately \$44,000 to \$66,000, and act as an incentive for many regional and rural students who are considering higher education.

Recommendation 4: That for ‘dependent’ young people from rural and regional areas the Parental Income Means Test thresholds for Youth Allowance should be revised up by 50% so that it rises from the current level of approximately \$44,000 to \$66,000.

NTEU believes that the goal of increasing rural and regional student participation should also be considered as part of the broader policy agenda which needs to address cultural and aspirational issues as well as encompass areas such as regional planning and development.

Indigenous Students

In reviewing the legislation and noting the Government's objective of increasing low SES, rural and regional participation more broadly, NTEU would urge the Committee to also take into consideration the barriers to appropriate educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

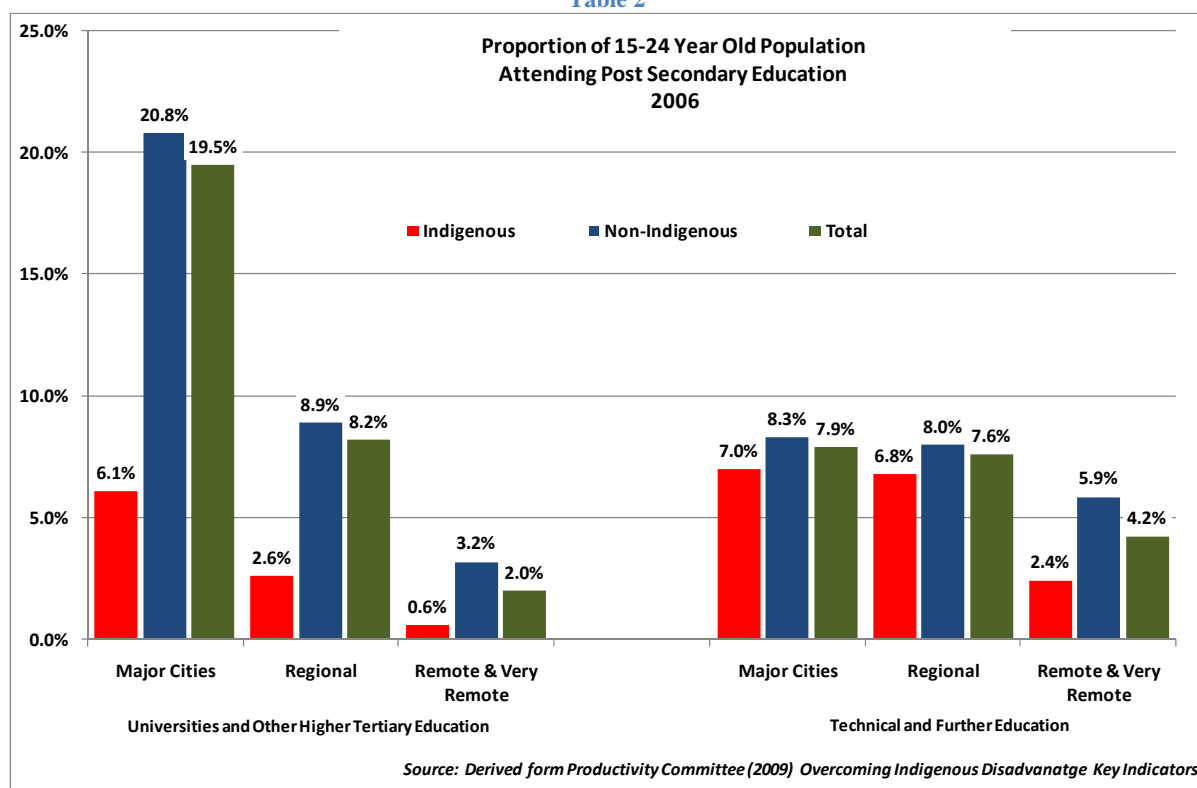
A number of factors work counter to increasing the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' in higher education. These factors include, but are not limited to:

- racism, both inside and outside the higher education sector,
- lack of culturally relevant curriculum,
- small numbers of Indigenous academic and general staff in universities,
- under resourcing of culturally appropriate support structures for students and
- higher levels of financial hardship in family and community structures.

These issues are multifaceted, interrelated and compounded by the absence of appropriate income support structures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Appropriate income support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will work to mitigate some of the wider financial factors that contribute to increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in higher education, and provide a decent level of financial support in a way that is sensitive to the realities of Indigenous family and community life.

Table 2



As the data presented in Table 2 clearly demonstrates, students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds have substantially lower levels of participation in universities

regardless of where they are located. However, given that a relatively larger proportion of the Indigenous population live in regional and remote Australia compared to the rest of the population, their lower participation rates are compounded by location as well cultural and other socio-economic geographic factors.⁹ In a recent study on Indigenous participation in higher education, it was noted that:¹⁰

Indigenous mainstream families, like other upwardly mobile socio-economic groups such as immigrants, now tend to send their children to university. But there is a widening gulf between the 60 percent or more Indigenous people working and living in mainstream Australia and the minority living in welfare-dependent urban ghettos, country towns, or remote settlements. (pg 1)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth also have substantially lower completion rates or higher attrition rates than non-Indigenous students with 62% of Indigenous students not completing their course compared to about 30% of the non-Indigenous group. Non-completion appears especially prevalent among male Indigenous students, with twice as many Indigenous women enrolling in tertiary education as men; and the gap is widening - currently 68% of Indigenous students are female.

The gender imbalance amongst Indigenous university students has a number of causes. Indigenous men rarely follow their fathers into trades or farms or businesses, and it remains that Indigenous boys tend to drop out of secondary school earlier and in larger numbers than girls. In welfare-dependent populations, the situation is often even worse, with very few boys completing Year 10. Furthermore, as more Indigenous women than men go to university or TAFE, some Indigenous men tend to view these institutions as places for women.¹¹

Fewer young people from the welfare-embedded population are being educated effectively and enrolling in universities than a decade ago, as off-campus centres and sub-degree enrolments wither away. Support services, which have been available for nearly 30 years, have recently been incorporated into 'Aboriginal programs,' with a declining emphasis on student support. (pg2)

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council's (IHEAC) submission to the Bradley Review of Higher Education noted that data from the Higher Education Statistical Collection on Indigenous student commencements, enrolments, and completions does not indicate trends toward improvement. In summary, the data indicated that:

- In the period 2001-2006, some 4000 Indigenous persons commenced higher education studies each year resulting in an annual enrolment of between 8300 and 9000 Indigenous students;
- Proportionate to population, these participation rates are less than half of those of non-Indigenous students;

⁹ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2009) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia.

¹⁰ J. Lane (2009) *Indigenous Participation in University Education Issue Analysis No. 110*, 27 May 2009, Centre for Independent Studies, Melbourne, pg.10

¹¹ Ibid.

- Between 2001 and 2006 the gap between actual participation rates and what would be expected on population level (parity) increased from 1.46 to 1.75 percentage points. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation is widening.¹²

NTEU notes that Indigenous scholarship programs have assisted Indigenous students in accessing higher education. However, these scholarships are limited in number and the relatively small amount of funding attached do little to defray the broader costs of undertaking a higher education degree. They are also generally not available to students who undertake pathway programs, despite these programs being offered by universities.

To effectively close the gap and provide a platform that allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access, participate and succeed at university, appropriate financial student income support is paramount; but this should not be viewed as the only means to raise the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' in the higher education sector. Attention should also be given to the interrelated challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students wanting to access higher education, which in part can be traced to the legacy of past governmental policies and continue to have an effect on subsequent generations. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to meet or exceed the societal view of success, Indigenous students today need to confront stereotypical attitudes, a scarcity of role-models/mentors inside and outside of the family structure and considerable financial impediments. Furthermore, many mature aged Indigenous students must overcome both personal and external barriers if they explore and undertake education options that will close gaps in their own learning outcomes.

It has recently been estimated that as much as 30% of Indigenous people across Australia are functionally illiterate.¹³ There is no doubt that targeted programs to raise literacy and numeracy levels must be a policy priority, and evidence of this need can be seen through the development and delivery of vocational certificate I and II courses as part of structured pathways programs. Along with wider financial support and learning pathways, encouraging Indigenous men to participate in tertiary education through targeted pathways programs is vital if we are to raise aspirations and create community role models and mentors for Indigenous youth.

Dedicated pathway programs from VET to Higher Education are also critical in that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students today are more likely to enrol in vocational education and training courses. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) notes that the relative importance of VET education to Koories in Victoria is indicated by the proportion of the Indigenous population who undertake VET courses; overall, 5,733 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled into VET courses in 2008, representing 19% of the total Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.¹⁴ If the goal is to encourage and raise the participation levels of Indigenous students in higher

¹² Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (2008) *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education*.

¹³ J. Lane. *op cit*. pg 10

¹⁴ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI) (2009) *Koorie VET Students in Victoria* (current draft).

education, then appropriate pathways from vocational education to higher education must not only be in place but also adequately recognised for the purposes of income support.

Given the alarming levels of disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians in relation to their participation in higher education in particular, NTEU believes that a set of national flagship of programs is needed to address these complex issues. In our submission to the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit held in 2008, the Union put forward an integrated approach with pathway programs beginning in the school sector and including employment opportunities.

The Union's Indigenous pathway proposal is outlined in further detail in Appendix A.

In addition to the creation of a pathways program NTEU has in past suggested the following specific changes to the operation of ABSTUDY and highlights these for the review of the Committee:

Recommendation 5: Classify all Indigenous students enrolled in enabling courses offered by Australian universities as Tertiary students for the purposes calculating their ABSTUDY Entitlements.

For many Indigenous students, access to higher education is through university enabling courses. These bridging courses assist in retention, progress and completion for further tertiary studies, and allow students to overcome challenges arising from previous education, language and skills shortfalls. However, students enrolled in enabling courses are classified as Secondary students for the purposes of ABSTUDY, and as such do not qualify for the full range of ABSTUDY entitlements. This exclusion is all the more perverse given that the fact that research has shown Indigenous students are significantly more likely to have a disability, be a sole parent, have children, be over 30 years of age, and less likely to rely on resources such as parent or partners for financial assistance.

Recommendation 6: Provide Indigenous Students enrolled in enabling courses at Australian universities access to Commonwealth Scholarships Program (CSP)

Formerly known as the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships (CLS), NTEU notes that the Commonwealth Scholarships Program was substantially expanded as a result of the *Scholarships for a Competitive Future* measure announced in the 2008-09 Budget, which doubles the number of available scholarships to 88,000 by 2012.

The stated policy objectives of the program are to *“facilitate choice in higher education and to increase higher education participation by students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, particularly Indigenous students and students from regional and remote areas.”*¹⁵

¹⁵ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2009) *Commonwealth learning Programs*, http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/scholarships_awards_prizes/commonwealth_learning_scholarships_programme.htm

As such, NTEU believes that these scholarships should be extended to Indigenous students who have enrolled in university run enabling courses as an incentive to participation in higher education.

Recommendation 7: Classifying all Indigenous students studying at university (including students enrolled in enabling courses) as being Independent for the purposes of ABSTUDY.

In the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education 2008*¹⁶ it was reported that 38% of Indigenous students in a Universities Australia report did not receive any form of Government or scholarship support and relied solely upon income from employment or parents/ partners. Furthermore, those that work often must choose between study and income, leading to further disincentives to study. The IHEAC submission sums up the barriers that Indigenous students face;¹⁷

... Indigenous students have to work to support themselves to study and at the same time live in poverty. Furthermore, students who work are penalised in the process, ensuring that they cannot, through any means, get beyond a level of income that is insufficient to live on. To get to this level of income, Indigenous students must compete for casual, insecure work and give up critical time that they need for study. They must compete for housing in a discriminatory and expensive housing market, especially in inner-metropolitan situations. Students are faced with a disincentive to study, given that, after all their effort, in dire poverty, with well reported social and health issues, and with reduced statistical chances of success, they must then repay a debt to the society historically responsible for their educational and social disadvantage.(pg 18)

Whilst lowering the age of independence will certainly assist a number of Indigenous students, this measure alone is unlikely to result in the targeted increases for Indigenous participation in higher education. While noting that almost two thirds of Indigenous students do not complete their studies, NTEU believes that every effort will need to be made to remove impediments to study, including considerable financial barriers, if real gains in participation are to be seen. As such, NTEU recommends all Indigenous students studying at university level should be considered as being independent for the purposes of ABSTUDY, and that other measures, such as housing and academic support for these student whilst studying, are linked to this. NTEU believes that through such measures Indigenous student participation can be substantially improved.

¹⁶ IHEAC (2008) *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education*, pg 17.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Appendix A



National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)

2020 Summit – Indigenous Education and Employment

Better educational and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians will be one of the key drivers to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) acknowledges the work of the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) in working to address Indigenous disadvantage in higher education.

In working toward the goals of improving education outcomes for Indigenous people a number of important strategies have been identified that require intercession to achieve a significant change. These include;

- Engagement with Indigenous students in years 8 & 9 of secondary school;
- Mentoring in senior years (10-12); &
- Transition to university through understanding of options for future employment

Options for advancing employment outcomes require further commitment from all industries. In the higher education sector addressing issues of further Indigenous employment requires particular engagement strategies, including;

- High level commitment to Indigenous employment; &
- Establishment of targets and strategies to improve employment outcomes.

Looking toward 2020, a strong commitment to address disadvantage in the areas of Indigenous education and employment is required by all levels of Government and higher education institutions. The following strategies have been identified as possibilities to create immediate and substantial change in Indigenous Australian communities.

Summary of 2020 Strategies

Education

1. Early identification (at Year 9) of Indigenous students who have the potential to complete a university education. Articulated pathways, including financial and learning support, to encourage the completion of Year 12.
2. Secondary schools to work in conjunction with local Indigenous communities to incorporate the skills and knowledge of the community in the schools Indigenous learning and support network. Identifying and supporting those Indigenous students who might be capable of progressing to university.
3. Offer tertiary education pathway scholarships (in addition to any AbStudy entitlements) to complete Year 12.

4. Scholarship holders to be given a guarantee that if and when they successfully gain entry into a university course that they will automatically qualify for another scholarship or HEC's exempt placement to allow them to complete their university studies. In addition students should also be offered mentoring and/or additional learning support.
5. Pathways from vocational education (VET) to higher education to be explored, capturing Indigenous students who may have dropped out of secondary school prior to Year 12 along with providing Indigenous students with a conduit to increase aspirations and qualifications.
6. Ensure engagement with Indigenous communities as a high priority for all education institutions. This will promote cultural understanding and support by Indigenous leaders for increased participation of Indigenous students.

Employment

1. The commitment to Indigenous employment should be made a high level priority at all higher education institutions.
2. Universities should appoint senior Indigenous specific positions including a Pro-Vice Chancellor (Indigenous) as well as positions across all levels of the institution including academic and general staff, from professorial appointments to security and garden maintenance staff.
3. Consideration must be paid to the terms and levels of employment to ensure full-time, ongoing positions are created to show a long-term commitment is being made by Universities to address Indigenous disadvantage.
4. Employment targets and strategies should be set by each institution to gauge the success of Indigenous employment. These targets and strategies will form part of the Universities Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) and will be managed and implemented by a University Indigenous committee reporting to the Vice-Chancellor and University Council.
5. Build on the successful work of the NTEU in establishing Indigenous Clauses in EBA's in other industries to enable industries outside Universities to implement effective employment strategies and targets.
6. Investigate alternative entry programs for Indigenous people to access employment in the public service.
7. Reduce the retirement age of Indigenous Australians to 55 years of age, with superannuation and other Government retirement benefits being made available in light of the reduced Indigenous life expectancy.