

To whom it may concern,

In a perfect world where indexation and inflation did not exist, it would take me over forty years to pay my HELP debt using voluntary repayments.

We often hear the phrase 'education is freedom', and, if you'd asked me eight years ago, I would have agreed. For me, education was freedom. University allowed me to escape an abusive household. It allowed me to escape bullying and death threats, and finally seek treatment for my chronic health issues.

I was the top of my class. I received academic awards each year and graduated Dux. I volunteered on campus and in the community, joined clubs, and tutored my classmates. I loved my time at university, but if I could go back and speak to my seventeen-year-old self, I'd tell her to run.

I'd tell her that the adults around her – parents, teachers, politicians – do not have her best interests at heart. I'd tell her that 'it'll come out of your tax' and 'you won't even notice' are code for 'you will never own a home' and 'this debt will be hanging over your head for the rest of your life.' I'd tell her that, instead of enjoying life, she will spend her mid-twenties in a cost of living crisis with financial anxiety so bad it regularly makes her vomit. I'd tell her that she gets guilty buying fresh fruit and vegetables at the supermarket.

I'd tell her that the liberal and labour governments do not care about young people or education, and that they'd rather line the pockets of billionaires than maintain the small discount on voluntary repayments. She'd probably ask me why, and ask 'surely some debt repaid is better than none at all?' I'd sigh, agree, and tell her I don't understand it either. I'd patiently explain that, with rent going up and wages stagnating, education is a luxury we cannot afford. I'd tell her that her European in-laws are appalled, and that her fancy French boyfriend paid less for his entire bachelors than did in admin fees for one class.

She'd ask 'but three years isn't so bad, right?'

I'd hug her and tell her my story. I'd gently break the news that the legislation has changed, and our dream job now requires honours, masters, and months of unpaid residencies. Another luxury we cannot afford.

The 7% indexation will increase my debt by around \$5000, making the \$3000 I've paid in voluntary repayments since graduating in October completely redundant.

Education in Australia is not freedom. It is a lifetime of burden.

I urge those in power to consider the financial, physical, and mental impact of this year's indexation and abolish indexation. I urge those in power to put people over profit and see that an educated society benefits all. It is important to remember that, while members of parliament make six figures and choose their own salaries, every day Australians are struggling to make ends meet. The decision

to continue indexing student debt is a decision to price Australians out of education. It is a decision that tells past, present, and future students that the Australian government does not deem them worthy of financial freedom, secure housing, healthcare, childcare, or food on the table.

Regards,