

Australian Democrats' minority report

- The Australian Democrats consider a strong and accessible higher education sector to be a key driver of innovation and competitiveness in Australia.
- As such, we support the increased appropriation of \$6.23 billion for new university places in medicine, general nursing, and mental health. We also support the additional funding for the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, and the Australian Research Council.
- The Democrats do, however, have a long-standing opposition to the introduction and increase of fees for tertiary education. Fees constitute a barrier to the pursuit of a tertiary education and can also undermine the high education standards that should be the foundation of our higher education sector
- The increase of the FEE-HELP limits laid out in Schedule 2, from the current \$50 950 up to \$80 000 for all degrees except for medicine, dentistry and veterinary science, where the limit would now be increased to \$100 000, on the surface may appear to allow these degrees to be more affordable.
- Over the long term though, these amendments will further entrench a system that is inequitable and will leave students who undertake those courses with a crippling personal debt.
- The Democrats will therefore move to abolish Schedule 2 of the Bill.
- We also support the view of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) that the Government's current indexation mechanism undermines any increases in funding for the sector. We agree with the AVCC that the Safety Net Adjustment should be replaced with the Wage Cost Index for the purposes of calculating indexation under the Commonwealth Grant Scheme.

Senator Andrew Bartlett

