

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 page 16

The committee recommends that the Government commission an independent expert panel to review the performance and effectiveness of the student income support system. Such a review should include public consultation and any reports and findings should be tabled in the Parliament. The committee recommends that the panel include a nominee from each of the key stakeholder groups.

Recommendation 2 page 18

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training and Centrelink coordinate the collection of data on income support measures and that disaggregated data on student income support payments be made publicly available.

Recommendation 3 page 19

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training include in its exit survey of students a question about the level of income support and whether it was a factor in students withdrawing from university.

Recommendation 4 page 19

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training develop clear policy objectives and performance indicators for the student income support system, and that Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY be assessed against these annually. The committee recommends that the results of these assessments be reported in the Department's annual report on Higher Education.

Recommendation 5 page 23

The committee recommends that a National Partnerships Group, consisting of representatives from Centrelink, the Student Financial Advisers Network and other relevant groups, be reconstituted and meet on a regular basis to discuss changes and difficulties associated with student financial assistance and to make recommendations to the relevant ministers.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

Recommendation 6 page 23

The committee recommends that the Auditor-General be requested to conduct an audit of Centrelink's delivery of financial assistance to students, paying particular attention to service delivery issues.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

Recommendation 7 page 27

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training undertake an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with reversing the Government's changes to the Away From Base Component of ABSTUDY in 1997 and 2000.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

Recommendation 8 page 35

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training undertake an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with:

- reducing the age of independence from 25 to each of 24, 23, 22, 21 and 18 years;
- increasing the parental income test threshold to a level that reasonably equates with annual average earnings;
- increasing the tax-free threshold for students; and
- increasing Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY payments to the level of the age pension.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

Recommendation 9 page 38

The committee recommends that Rent Assistance be made available for all recipients of Austudy, but not before a costing is undertaken by the Department of Education, Science and Training. The committee recommends that the costing be completed before the end of 2005 and reported to the Parliament.

Recommendation 10 page 39

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training undertake an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with making the method of indexation for student income support payments consistent with the indexation of the pension.

Recommendation 11 page 43

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training undertake an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with exempting university-funded scholarships and scholarships funded by benefactors and philanthropists from the social security personal income test.

Recommendation 12 page 53

The committee recommends that the Government, in consultation with the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and student organisations, undertake regular five-year surveys of student finances and work patterns as per the AVCC's *Paying Their Way* report (2001). These surveys must include a review of all ancillary fees.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

Recommendation 13 page 59

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training undertake an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with a comprehensive student income support payment which is separate from the existing Youth Allowance and which provides financial assistance to students for the duration of their course.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

Recommendation 14 page 63

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training examine a new income contingent loan scheme to replace the Student Financial Supplement Scheme.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

The Democrats acknowledge the benefits provided to students through the Student Financial Supplement Scheme, but believe it is not an appropriate model for further consideration.

Recommendation 15 page 65

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training undertake an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with restoring the Educational Textbook Subsidy Scheme.

Government senators do not agree with this recommendation.

