



Friday 26th June 2020

As the largest student organisation in the country, and one that values students' interests, the USU has a principled obligation to speak out about the Federal Government's attacks on tertiary education.

On June 19, the Morrison Government announced a huge overhaul to tertiary education. The Education Minister, Dan Tehan, plans to double the price of Arts, Communication and Humanities degrees, costing students approximately \$45,000 for a three year degree (an increase of 113%). Law, Economics, Management and Commerce degrees will also face fee hikes of 28% - now costing students \$14,500 a year. The government plans to decrease the fees for STEM courses. Yet, the total funding of STEM education will go down as the slight increase in government contributions will fail to match massive falls in student contributions. These funding shortfalls will perpetuate a decline in the standards of students' education with increased class sizes as a result of cuts to staff and resources. This policy is fundamentally bad for all students.

These cuts would have a demonstrably adverse impact on the University community for years to come. Firstly, they would create the conditions for fee increases into the future, which speaks to a broader trend of privatisation and deregulation proposed recently. This is deeply concerning considering similar models in the US illustrate the deep flaws of privatised higher education in perpetuating and surmounting inequality and elitism.

Secondly, it will solidify cost as an insurmountable barrier when highschoolers are deciding what to study, or even whether to study at university. This will particularly hurt students from financially disadvantaged families and backgrounds.

Thirdly, the attack on humanities subjects in particular undermines the essential critical thinking skills taught by humanities degrees. History and the arts are essential for thriving modern communities. This targeted attack also promotes the misguided idea that education should only ever be vocational, and moreover, that humanities could never meaningfully contribute to a vocation. Yet with the rise of AI and automation, it has never been more important for these complex skills to be taught to inform the emerging workforce.

These policies are being pushed through by politicians who benefited from free education. Now they want students to shoulder the burden for funding at a time when youth unemployment is above 16% and students look to education for meaningful direction in their lives.

These policies also come at a time when the Government has repeatedly denied stimulus to the higher education sector. Universities have been hit among the hardest by this pandemic and it is the government's responsibility to protect the higher education sector.

Universities are the institutions within our civil society that provide citizens with the skills to question, challenge and hold power to account. Students and staff must fight to protect our rights and freedoms to access an education that is affordable, high quality and multidisciplinary.

As such, the University of Sydney Union Board:

- (a) Calls on students to campaign against these fee hikes in its forms, and urges everyone to attend relevant protests where it is safe to do so.
- (b) Commits to fighting for fully-funded free education and opposing user pays models which prioritise particular disciplines or degrees.
- (c) Commits to joining the campaign to pressure the Federal Government to protect higher education through targeted stimulus.
- (d) Commits to posting information about the cuts and the efforts to oppose them via USU Social Media Channels – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WeChat.