

Higher Education

Universities

1. Congress acknowledges that, as the third largest export industry in Australia the tertiary education sector is integral to the economic well being of the nation. Universities constitute the largest component of the sector generating nearly \$17 billion annually in export income and providing over 100,000 jobs.
2. Congress notes that, although universities are public institutions and are highly regulated by government, public revenue accounts for only 40 per cent of university income, with the remainder derived from international student income (approximately 20 per cent of total income), domestic student income (35 per cent) and other.5%
3. Congress acknowledges that the reliance by universities and others in the tertiary sector on export income exposes the sector to volatility in the market and fluctuations in currency rates. Any downturns in the market result in significant job losses, which, given the scope of the sector, can impact negatively on the Australian economy more broadly.
4. Congress recognises that universities not only contribute economically to Australia's prosperity but are a core social and cultural institution in providing education and research. Along with the CSIRO, universities are the site of basic research which is depended upon for the breakthroughs and innovation addressing the big issues of our times.
5. Congress acknowledges that the Rudd and Gillard Governments have taken action to redress more than a decade of neglect to significantly raise Australia's investment, participation, and performance in higher education by providing additional funding of near \$6billion over a four period commencing in 2010.
6. However, Australia's public investment is still well below that of other industrialised economies, and Congress notes that Australian higher education students currently pay amongst the highest fees in the world to attend public universities.
7. The current levels of funding also fall short of the projected income needed meet the increases in domestic student load as a result of government's deregulation of student places and the setting of national student targets.

8. Congress calls upon the government to increase the base funding of Australia's public universities by 10 per cent (as recommended by the 2007 Review of Higher Education) and a measured increase of public investment to an equivalent of 1 per cent of GDP, an increase from the current 0.7 per cent.
9. Such an increase will put Australia on an even footing with other industrialised economies and assist in generating a more secure and sustainable economic future beyond the current boom in the resources market.
10. Congress welcomes the Labor Government's adoption of the following national targets by 2025:
 - a) 40 percent of 25-34 year olds will have attained at least a bachelor-level qualification; and
 - b) 20 percent of undergraduate enrolments in higher education will be students from low socio-economic backgrounds.
11. Congress calls upon the Government to adopt the following measures to help achieve these targets:
 - a) further improvements to student income support;
 - b) require all institutions in receipt of government subsidies for teaching and learning to develop programs aimed at improving the participation rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including specifically targeting the increased participation of Indigenous Australians;
 - c) ensure that institutions that charge the Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF) provide adequate funding so as to ensure the provision of student support, welfare and advocacy services; that each institution has in place appropriate processes so as to ensure independent and democratic student representation; and that students, through their representatives, have control over the allocation and spending of SSAF funds on student related services and programs.
12. Intellectual freedom and institutional autonomy are intrinsic to quality university teaching and research. Congress commends the Federal Government for putting in place legislation that enshrines these principles. However, Congress notes that restrictions upon academic research into areas of concern either through a lack of funding or direction of management may be viewed as impediments to the exercising of intellectual freedom.
13. Congress notes that higher education is the most highly casualised industry after tourism and retail. While the full time equivalent proportion of casual employees is approximately 25 per cent, in real terms there are more than 160,000 casual and contract employees working in universities, and more that 50 per cent of all undergraduate teaching is carried out by hourly employees.