

MEDIA RELEASE

SCHOLARSHIPS MUST BE EQUITABLE – ATN

Students in receipt of university issued cash scholarships are being unfairly treated under current Federal legislation, according to the Australian Technology Network (ATN)

With more than 170,000 students across the five universities, almost 20 percent of whom are from low socio economic backgrounds, the ATN says the current legislation, due to be debated in Parliament this week, must be amended so that all scholarships, whether from government or universities, are exempted from the Social Security Income test.

ATN Director, Vicki Thomson, says an Australian Democrat amendment, which ensures an exemption, deserves the support of the Senate when it is debated this week.

“Australia’s economic future depends, in large part, on the development of a skilled and flexible workforce. Student poverty is a significant barrier to participation and retention in higher education and, thus, to the education, training, maintenance and improvement of this workforce,” Ms Thomson said.

“It therefore follows that adequate financial support, for a broad range of students, which enables them to study full-time and apply themselves appropriately to their studies, is in both students’ best interests and in Australia’s best interest.”

“ATN statistics reveal a student population where there is considerable need for financial support. Some is provided in the form of University scholarships, but this support is diminished if it affects their social security payments.”

Ms Thomson said the current anomaly should be rectified in pursuit of the nation-building goals of an educated population and workforce and as an incentive for the deterred or discouraged students who believe they simply cannot afford to undertake tertiary studies.

“Students assessed as equity scholarship eligible should be afforded the same status under the legislation, regardless of the funding source of the scholarship. This issue must be resolved to ensure that both students and universities are not disadvantaged,” she said.

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