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STUDENT INCOME SUPPORT PACKAGE CRITICAL - ATN

Successful passage of the Government's student income support package (*Social Security and Other Legislation (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009*) is a crucial element in redressing university access and participation and must be passed if income support is to reach those students who need it most.

Chair of the **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)**, Professor Ross Milbourne, said the package of measures, due to be debated in the Senate on Monday, will ensure that public funding is directed at those most in need. However he cautioned against proposed Coalition amendments in the Senate which in any way jeopardised income support for an increased number of potential students.

"What seems to be forgotten in this debate is that more low-income students are going to get access to Youth Allowance without having to do a gap year at all, and that the thresholds for at-home are much lower than the thresholds for away-from-home.

Professor Milbourne said the ATN was also strongly opposed to Opposition amendments to slash the value of the Start-up scholarship from \$2,254 to \$1000 as a means of funding their proposed amendments.

"This is the **only** scholarship available to those students who are in extremely poor financial circumstances and who are not relocating to study. Slashing its value to just \$1000 fails to recognise the genuine need of these students and would be barely enough to cover the cost of books.

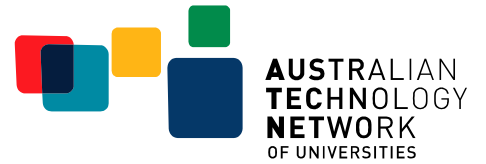
A recent study undertaken by ATN member, the University of Technology, Sydney revealed that any reduction in this scholarship is likely to have a significantly negative effect on student participation and retention rates.

This study looked at data from 2005-2008 which showed that since 2005, equity scholarship recipients have had consistently higher retention rates than non-scholarship recipients from low-SES backgrounds.

"Reducing the value of the Start-up scholarships will only disadvantage low income students who rely on it to augment their current Centrelink benefits. The Start-up scholarship is for all students on Youth Allowance and such a move is simply a way of shifting money around for what can only be seen as political posturing.

"All ATN universities feel that it is both a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that our students, regardless of their financial background, are able to access a higher education.

"The measures outlined by the Government ensure that student income support payments are better targeted and provide more assistance to those students who need it the most. At a time when it is more important than ever to grow our national skills base we must have a suite of measures in place which



encourage participation - not deter it.

“Student poverty is a significant barrier to participation and retention in higher education, and to the development of a skilled and flexible workforce. Appropriately targeted financial support, for a broad range of students, which enables them to study and apply themselves, is in the students and in Australia’s best interest,” Professor Milbourne said.

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