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MEDIA RELEASE

CUTS TO STUDENT EQUITY LOADING SHORTSIGHTED

The **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)** says cuts outlined today by the Federal Opposition to the low SES participation program are short sighted and could act as a disincentive as universities work to recruit students from low SES backgrounds.

ATN Chair, Professor Ross Milbourne said the equity loading provided to universities was designed to assist in developing appropriate pathways and support services for students from low SES backgrounds who wished to access a university education.

“We genuinely believe that a better educated society leads to a competitive and innovative society. If we want to take our place in a competitive global market, we will need to ensure that we have a skilled and flexible workforce drawn from all corners of society including those groups that are currently under-represented.

“ 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. They have a significant contribution to make to the future human capital of our nation.

“Under the current arrangements, the Federal Government has provided \$433 million over three years to assist universities to meet the government’s equity targets - targets we fully support and indeed advocated. \$325 million of this funding is for equity loading – to offset additional costs such as establishing pathways and support services,” Professor Milbourne said.

The Coalition, in its election costings estimates released today has indicated that it would cut this funding by almost \$227 million.

“This is short sighted and ignores the fact that our economy is dependent upon the development of a skilled, flexible and innovative workforce. These cuts will seriously impede our ability to firstly ensure we have the right pathways in place for all students, and secondly to ensure we have a diverse and highly skilled workforce.”

ATN universities enrol 20% of the nation’s students, 19% of low SES students, 14% of disabled students and 17% of indigenous students. Our retention rate across the ATN of disadvantaged students is above the national average. With more than 180,000 students studying at an ATN University across the nation, the ATN places a high priority on ensuring a university education is available to all whom seek it.

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