

The Australian

Libs to cut incentives for poorer university students

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A COALITION government would slash incentive payments for universities to enrol more students from poorer backgrounds.

The Labor government has allocated \$325 million over three years as a per student loading to encourage universities to enrol more students from poorer backgrounds.

But in its election costings the Coalition is proposing to cut \$227m from the program.

Students from the poorest 25 per cent of society make up only 15 per cent of university places. Labor has set a target to raise that participation to 20 per cent by 2020.

Universities last night slammed the Coalition policy as short-sighted.

"It is both a moral and an ethical obligation to ensure that our students, regardless of their financial background, are able to access a higher education," said Professor Ross Milbourne, chairman of the Australian Technology Network of universities.

"This is short-sighted and ignores the fact that our economy is dependent upon the development of a skilled, flexible and innovative workforce," he said.

Glenn Withers, chief executive of Universities Australia, said the cut in funding would make it harder to reach participation goals that both sides of politics have identified.

He said he would also be seeking assurances from the Coalition that its plan to use the Education Investment Fund to finance stand-alone trade training centres and an extension of Youth Allowance payments would not cut into infrastructure funds for universities.

The Coalition has allocated from the investment fund \$690m over four years to the training centres, and a further \$322m to Youth Allowance.

Dr Withers said he was pleased the Coalition appeared to have otherwise preserved the "broad funding framework" for universities.

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