

WIPE STUDENT DEBT AND MAKE TAFE AND UNI FREE

Our plan for the biggest investment in tertiary education in Australian history

Liberal and Labor governments have cut funding and hiked fees to Universities and TAFEs.

Students are treated like customers who graduate with massive debts and education is treated like a commodity to profit from.

The Greens are the first and only party to commit to abolishing all outstanding student debt. We will make TAFE and university free and guarantee a livable income for students. We will ensure staff and students have a say in how their institutions are run.

The Greens will ensure free education for everyone, whether you are leaving school, changing careers, retraining later in life or looking to gain new skills and knowledge. Education is a right, not a privilege reserved for just those who can afford to pay for it.

THE GREENS WILL:

- ▲ **Abolish all student debt**
- ▲ **Fund lifelong free education for all**
- ▲ **Guarantee every student a liveable income**
- ▲ **Reverse the Liberals' cuts and boost university funding by 10% to enable quality teaching, learning and research**
- ▲ **Increase job security and slash casualisation at TAFE and uni**
- ▲ **Invest in world class research**
- ▲ **Democratise our universities by giving power back to staff and students on campuses**
- ▲ **Make our public universities and TAFEs sustainable and accessible through the Green Education Infrastructure Fund**

ABOLISH STUDENT DEBT

Many current MPs, including the Prime Minister, went to university when it was free¹, while now students are being saddled with tens of thousands of dollars in study debt that takes decades to repay.

In 2020-21, nearly three million people owed an average of \$23,685 in study debt.² This is unsustainable and wholly unfair. The cost of living and housing are skyrocketing and inflation is on the rise. Student debt, when education should be free, should not be an added burden on people who are already struggling, especially after the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Cancelling student debt will help narrow the inequality gap.

Abolishing all student debt will have enormous positive impacts for millions of people who will be able to afford to live a better life.

The Greens will abolish all outstanding student debt.

Student Financial Supplement Scheme

Our plan will also wipe debt accrued under the extremely unfair Student Financial Supplement

Scheme (SFSS)³ that continues to hurt some of the most vulnerable people.

Abolition of all existing student debt, and a fee-free future where none is accrued, is a hip-pocket win for students, frees students from perverse incentives to study 'cheap' courses and removes perceived barriers to access.

FREE TAFE AND UNIVERSITY

Students leaving university or TAFE now face greater pressures than ever before, including high youth unemployment and record housing and living costs. No one should start their life with a huge loan hanging over their heads.

Free university and TAFE will give everybody a fair go, break the cycle of disadvantage and guarantee access. For those who want to study, it's our job to make that possible.

That is why the Greens will fully fund fee-free TAFE and university. The Greens believe that TAFE should be the first priority for all federal funding for Vocational Education and Training. There should be no government funding for providers that operate for private profit.

¹ Mehreen Faruqi Outs LNP Politicians Who Benefited From Free University. Online at Junkee: <https://junkee.com/arts-degree-doubles-free-university/258393>

² https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2021/November/HELP-2020-21

³ From the Guardian Australia: "The student financial supplement scheme enticed students to take out "low-cost" loans by trading in their entitlements to youth allowance, Austudy or pensioner education supplement. Every dollar of welfare a student gave up entitled them to \$2 in loan. The scheme was roundly criticised for pushing the lowest-paid students to give up their social security entitlements." <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/05/students-who-forfeited-welfare-under-unfair-loan-scheme-owe-government-21bn>

10% UNI FUNDING BOOST

For too long governments have cut university funding, forcing them to do more with less and impacting on education and research.

The Greens will reverse the Government's "Job-ready Graduates" changes which cut government funding for universities⁴. We will further increase funding per-Commonwealth Supported Place student by 10%. This will deliver the funding universities need to improve learning and teaching conditions, reduce class sizes and enable researchers to pursue solutions to the big problems of our time.

A LIVEABLE INCOME FOR ALL STUDENTS

The high cost of living remains a huge burden on students and can create a substantial barrier to accessing education. It's outrageous that one in seven students regularly goes without food and other necessities while studying and nearly a third of students work more than 20 hours a week.⁵

The Greens plan will support students by raising and expanding Youth Allowance, Austudy and Abstudy to guarantee that every young person receives an income they can live on.

By abolishing the independence test and simplifying the framework, all young people 18

and over would receive the same guaranteed income of \$1,300 per fortnight (whether they are studying or looking for work). Young people living away from home would no longer be subject to the parental means test.

FUND WORLD CLASS RESEARCH

The Greens have fought against the Liberals' cuts to research and against political interference in research grants. We will make a massive investment in research:

- Boost block grant funding for universities by \$5.5 billion
- Invest \$70 million per year in additional funding for the Australian Research Council's Future Fellowships scheme to support mid-career researchers
- Invest \$50 million per year for a Secure Work for Researchers fund, to help universities and research institutes transition their workers to secure employment;
- Invest an additional \$1.3 billion in key research bodies such as the CSIRO, Australian Research Council, and National Health and Medical Research Centre.
- Invest \$1 billion a year for a research translation fund to turn ground breaking ideas into world changing applications;
- Provide \$50 million per year to improve diversity in science and research and development by funding programs that support First Nations peoples, women and LGBTIQ+ people in science;

⁴ 'The government would save \$1 billion a year with proposed university reforms – but that's not what it's telling us' <https://theconversation.com/the-government-would-save-1-billion-a-year-with-proposed-university-reforms-but-thats-not-what-its-telling-us-142256>

⁵<https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/180713-2017-UA-Student-Finance-Survey-Report.pdf>

SECURE WORK FOR STAFF

Staff working conditions influence student learning conditions. For decades the employment security of university staff has been eroded. In 2019, 65% of all staff in universities were employed in insecure casual and fixed-term contracts.⁶

Years of funding cuts by governments and the ensuing corporatisation and marketisation of higher education has led to the rampant casualisation of TAFE and university staff. Wage theft has become systemic in universities⁷. Casualisation of staff and their underpayments are undeniably linked and have often been highlighted as the current business model of universities⁸.

The Greens will ensure universities provide secure, long term jobs for their staff by working with staff and their unions to link funding under the Commonwealth Grant Scheme to reduce the rate of insecure work in universities and set targets for high rates of secure work with fair conditions.

DEMOCRATISE OUR UNIVERSITIES

As successive governments cut university funding, they also eroded university staff and

⁶ NTEU 2021-22 budget submission, derived from "Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2020 Staff data," <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/staff-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2020-staff-data>

⁷ Wage theft is 'systemic': 21 universities under investigation. See AFR <https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/education/wage-theft-is-systemic-21-universities-under-investigation-20211020-p591kw>

⁸ See above reference

students' say in how universities are run by stacking governance bodies with external appointments and giving corporations influence over curriculum and research.

In order to ensure academic freedom and a safe learning environment, our universities must be well-funded, and decision making power must be handed back to the students and workers of the university.

The Greens will work closely with staff, students and their unions to democratise our universities, by:

- Capping Vice-Chancellor pay and making their positions elected
- Boosting elected staff and student positions on university governing bodies and limiting corporate appointments
- Supporting open access research and opening university libraries and spaces to the community
- Funding student unionism and ensuring student funds are allocated to democratic student organisations
- Improving transparency of university operations and governance

INVEST IN SUSTAINABLE AND ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE

The Greens will make sure our unis, TAFEs and schools are sustainable and accessible through a four-year \$5 billion Green Education Infrastructure Fund to support sustainable capital works, retrofitting and refurbishments.

HOW THE GREENS HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR YOU

In parliament and the community, the Greens are vocal and proud in our support for free public TAFE and university education. We are the first and only party to call for abolition of student debt and continue to lead the fight for better funded and universal higher education:

- The Greens successfully pressured the Government to extend the \$550 Coronavirus Supplement payment to hundreds of thousands of students on Youth Allowance, Austudy and Abstudy.
- We lead the fight against the Liberals' university fee hikes and funding cuts that are pushing students into decades of debt.
- The Greens are the only party to oppose political interference in research funding and have been leading on this issue through a parliamentary bill and a Senate inquiry to end political intervention.
- We will continue to work with university staff to reveal the extent of wage theft at universities and support casual staff to have their say on how this impacts them and what must be done to make change.

PAYING FOR OUR PLAN

By making billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of tax and winding back handouts to big polluters, we can build a better life for all of us.

1 in 3 big corporations pays no tax and many big corporations and billionaires send their profits offshore tax free.

The Greens will tax billionaires with a new 'billionaires tax', require big corporations making excessive profits to pay a 'corporate super-profits tax' and axe billions of dollars in handouts to the coal, oil and gas giants that are driving the climate crisis.

These measures have all been costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office.

When big corporations and billionaires pay their fair share, everyone can have the services they need for a better life.

FIND ALL OUR POLICIES:

greens.org.au/platform