

Media release

GSA Says "NO" to the Proposed Changes to HECS/HELP Supports

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Yesterday graduate students awoke to the news that university students who have not been able to pass half their subjects in their first year will lose their Commonwealth Supported Place and access to the HECS-HELP loan scheme. This will result in vulnerable students being asked to pay tens of thousands of dollars a year upfront if they wish to persevere in their studies. GSA strongly opposes this proposal, especially at a time when students are already facing high levels of uncertainty and a lack of government support.

GSA President Jeremy Waite is appalled and commented - *"It is particularly callous that the Federal Government continues to introduce poorly designed policies that only serve to further disadvantage students who already face significant barriers to higher education."*

GSA believes in free, accessible education and believes that concerns around students continually taking on multiple degrees can be antithetical to this aim if it drives up the cost of the system to unsustainable levels. However, the proposed policy does little to address the Education Minister's concerns that "students can't take on a study load they won't complete, leaving them without a qualification but a large debt." This policy instead creates further barriers to education for those who need government support the most.

GSA Activities Officer Matthew Harper-Gomm thinks - *"There's a great opportunity here to reflect on just how far the higher education discourse in this country has shifted in favour of a business ontology."*

While universities would have the ability to consider special circumstances, GSA's Higher Education Subcommittee believes that this subjective system, which differs between universities is fundamentally unjust, particularly when universities including the University of Melbourne have attempted to significantly limit access to special consideration in recent years.

GSA LGBTIQ Officer Lauren Taylor says - *"Of particular concern is that this rule does not come with associated funding to improve oversight of recruitment so that students are not taken advantage of, or to improve supports for disadvantaged or struggling students. These supports are more sorely needed than ever due to COVID-19. Such a punitive rule is about ideology, not about improving the higher education system."*

GSA will continue to advocate for a fairer higher education system, and shares the concerns of the National Tertiary Union (NTEU) and University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) about this proposal. GSA will continue to work with other bodies such as the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) to strongly object to the implementation of these policies.

About the Graduate Student Association

The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association (GSA) is the peak representative body for all graduate students at the University of Melbourne. We are an independent association led by an elected student council, providing representation, events, training and support.

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