

Beyond

Tertiary education should provide students with the skills and confidence needed to either thrive in the workforce or continue studying. After entering the workforce student debt repayments should not significantly lower a person's standard of living.

Key Issues

The key issues involved in life beyond tertiary education include debt burden and repayments resulting from educational loan schemes, the employment prospects of graduates, and the ability of graduates to act as engaged citizens. Also, students' aspirations are important. It appears that too much emphasis is placed on reaching university, as opposed to other tertiary education avenues.

Recommendations

Increase work experience as a component of tertiary courses, to prepare students for their occupational field.

Actively promote on-campus careers counselling, making students aware of alternative career paths.

Explore the potential outcomes of free tertiary education and if it is found wanting, ensure that debt repayment thresholds are maintained at an appropriate level, not encroaching on the standard of living.

The What's Fair in Education? forum will address these issues and recommendations, with an interactive workshop facilitated by Uniting Church member, Lionel Parrott, who has extensive experience in student career development.

The forum will be held on October 17, 2007 at 4:30 PM in building 20 (level 1, courtroom 2), RMIT University. (Corner La Trobe and Russell streets.)

- Students from high socio-economic (SES) backgrounds are far more likely to pay their HECS/FEE-HELP fees up-front, leaving students from lower SES backgrounds with a large debt upon entering the workforce and a consequent lower after-tax income.¹

- The national HECS debt has reached nearly \$13 billion with the Government expecting close to 20% (\$2.5 billion) not to be paid back², while one in three OECD nations provide free education.³

- Professor Richard James found that two-thirds of secondary students expressed a preference for university over other options.⁴

- Despite such preferences only half the proportion aspiring to will go on to university and realise their aspirations.⁵

- Although TAFE graduates have greater labour force participation than university graduates, they are twice as likely to be employed part-time (25% compared to 12%) and more than twice as likely to be unemployed (12% compared to 5%).⁶

¹Birch, E.R. & Miller, P. (2006). HECS and HECS-HELP: Equity issues. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. Vol. 28, pp. 97-119.

²DEST (2007). Higher Education Report 2005. <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/5213D64C-C3BA-4D8A-B139-7906281D27AD/16972/HigherEdReport2005FINAL.pdf>

³OECD. (2007). Education at a glance. http://www.oecd.org/document/30/0,3343,en_2649_39263294_39251550_1_1_1_1,00.html

⁴James, R. (2000). TAFE, university or work? The early preferences and choices of students in years 10, 11, and 12.

National Centre for Vocational Research. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr9030.pdf>

⁵DSF (2007). How young people are faring in 2007: at a glance. <http://www.dsf.org.au/papers/197.htm>

⁶NCVER (2002). TAFE and university graduates 15-24 years. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/statistics/aag/tafeuni01/tafeuni01.pdf>