



# Queensland Independent Education Union

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### HECS debt puts Australia at risk

The Queensland Independent Education Union (QIEU) today called on the Federal Government to reconsider HECS fee levels in the face of the \$13 billion debt owed by Australian students.

QIEU General Secretary Terry Burke said students were being faced with unprecedented levels of debt in order to gain university qualifications, in turn threatening the country's ability to compete in the global economy.

"The prospect of a high HECS debt is not only a deterrent for young Australians but also an impediment to the level of education we need in this country to compete globally," Mr Burke said.

"Unless some serious and significant measures are taken to reduce the debt levels faced by Australian students, this country will continue to lag behind without an adequate number of skilled and trained workers," Mr Burke said.

"With more and more jobs requiring university qualifications, young Australians are being given no real option but to take on a degree which puts them in a high level of debt," Mr Burke said.

Mr Burke said comments by Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop that HECS fees could be reduced through university cost cutting were a slap in the face to both students and universities given the Federal Government's continued under funding of tertiary institutions.

"These comments are also extremely offensive to students and their families, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are placed under unfair and unnecessary pressure as a result of HECS debt and are struggling to make ends meet," he said.

"Let Julie Bishop sit at the kitchen table with these families and tell that to them as they work out the debt oppressed future that awaits a graduate student," Mr Burke said.

"Yet again the irresponsible approach to public policy on education and skills adopted by the Howard Government has been shown," he said.

Mr Burke said he agreed with Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd that Australia's HECS debt level was a disgrace and welcomed the Australian Labor Party's commitment to cut the cost of university education.

"Australia needs a sensible and serious approach to higher education policy and the issue of HECS debt, something the Federal Government has failed to do," Mr Burke said.

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*"The Queensland Independent Education Union represents over 14,000 non-government education sector employees including teachers, principals, school support staff, grounds and maintenance staff, early childhood education staff and employees in business, international and English language colleges."*