



## **MEDIA RELEASE – James Harker-Mortlock – Independent for Hume – Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2013**

### **TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEEE AT IT AGAIN CUTTING THE TERTIARY SECTOR**

*“In yet another example of the Tweedledum and Tweedledee political duopoly of the Liberal and Labor Parties, both parties have the tertiary sector in their sights”* said James Harker-Mortlock, Independent Candidate for Hume. *“The Federal Government’s proposal to remove \$2.8 billion from the tertiary sector to fund its proposed school reforms could lead to bigger classes, fewer disadvantaged students attending higher education and less research and innovation. Such a move may well impact most upon regional universities and their students which do not have the private sector resources available to city universities to help make-up any funding shortfall.*

*Such a move also encourages our universities to become more and more just educational degree factories for foreign fee paying students. I do not believe that this was the purpose for which Australian taxpayers built universities.*

*It is unfortunate to note that Mr. Abbott is quoted in ‘The Age’ of April 21st as saying **“I don’t think anyone should expect those cuts to be reversed”** One wonders why, if he does not intend to implement the changes recommended by the Gonski review, unless, of course, he sees no value in maintaining the quality of our tertiary education sector?”*

However, as is often the case, it seems that both major parties are out of step with community opinion. Peak body Universities Australia has conducted a telephone poll in which 87 per cent of 800 people surveyed expressed support for an increase in university funding.

While the Rudd and Gillard governments have financed a major expansion in student numbers, Universities Australia says base teaching funding per student has fallen by 23 per cent since 1995, and will now fall a further 2 per cent by 2015.

Universities Australia said some 82 per cent of poll respondents agreed that cutting funding to universities would threaten Australia's future. Some 51 per cent said they would "strongly support" a funding boost with a further 37 per cent opting for the response "somewhat support". The poll was taken the week before the cuts were announced last month.

The government plans to reduce tertiary education funding by \$900 million over four years, but students will bear the brunt of the reductions. A further \$1.2 billion will be cut from next year with the conversion of the \$2,050 Start Up scholarships for financially disadvantaged students into loans that will be added to a student's HECS debt. The change has been grandfathered such that students already receiving the scholarships will continue to receive them. A further \$230 million is being saved by scrapping the upfront discount on HECS payments, and another \$520 million by capping tax deductions on self-education expenses.

*“This means that tertiary students are the ones actually funding the Gonski reforms, not the government”,* said Mr. Harker-Mortlock. *“It’s not as though students are lazy. Another survey by Universities Australia has found that most students are being forced to take on part-time jobs. Nearly 12,000 students were surveyed, revealing that the average undergraduate university student is working an average of 16 hours a week on top of their studies.*

*I strongly oppose the proposed tertiary funding cuts which will make attending university even harder – and particularly for those who are most disadvantaged, including those from rural and regional areas and indigenous students. Tweedledum and Tweedledee – together, dunning down Australia.”*

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