

AUSTRALIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM IS TRULY WORLD-CLASS

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In an Op-Ed published today, Luke Sheehy, Executive Director of the Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) has backed the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP), calling it “a world-class” system.

Mr Sheehy said HELP was “a genius Australian invention” which has provided affordable access to university for generations of Australians.

Since 1989 over 4.9 million students have benefited from the HELP system. If participation rates for young people had remained below 20 per cent as they were in the 1980s, a million Australians would have missed out on a university education.

HELP has been so successful that it has turbo-charged participation in universities right around the world. It has been replicated in Hungary, New Zealand, South Korea and the United Kingdom, successfully driving millions more students through the system.

“It is understandable that the spotlight has been placed on the HELP system given the current cost of living pressures being felt across the economy and Australians young and old feeling the pinch,” Mr Sheehy added.

“By all means, we should have a meaningful debate about student contributions, the anomalous impact of current inflation and the settings around repayments, but what should not be up for debate is the foundation of the HELP system – it must be defended and preserved. Remember the foundation of HELP is that not a single dollar is paid upfront, so no one is priced out. Repayments are only asked of you when you are earning a full-time wage. This means you only pay when you can afford it.

“The reality is that removing the established HELP system risks a future government radically cutting places or reintroducing fees without the HELP safety net that all students have come to rely on.

“Let’s resist the temptation to pull apart the entire system because the fundamentals are sound and have stood the test of time. We are at a fork in the road in this grand year of review and higher education reform. The answer is not to tear down a world-class system which has worked extraordinarily well for almost 35 years, the answer is to make it even better.”

The full Op-Ed is available on the ATN Universities website: <https://atn.edu.au/news-and-events/latest-news/atn-op-ed-help-for-university-students/>

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The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) was established in 1999 and brings together Australia's six real world universities focused on enterprise, impact and finding solutions to issues facing our rapidly changing economy and society. Our member universities are Curtin University, Deakin University, RMIT University, The University of Newcastle, University of South Australia, and University of Technology Sydney. Our universities produce Australia's most job-ready graduates and undertake world-class research with real-world impact. Through our innovation we are proud disruptors challenging the status quo. ATN universities provide world-class education to almost 310,000 students and teach 20 per cent of domestic higher education students and 19 per cent of international students. We are the fastest-growing university grouping in terms of domestic students. Together, we are proud of who we include, not exclude, with a strong commitment to equity, excellence, and social justice. ATN is one of Australia's leading university peak bodies with a track record of advocating and shaping positive policy outcomes with all levels of government.