

Media Release

Commonwealth Learning Scholarship Falls Short of the Mark

The Australian Law Students' Association (ALSA) today welcomed Labor's announcement to double the number of Commonwealth Learning Scholarships (CLS), but cautioned that there were still a number of flaws in the scholarship programme.

ALSA Vice President (Education) Mitch Riley said that it was commendable to see both parties placing education squarely on the federal election agenda. "Today's announcement is certainly a positive step.

"However, ALSA and the Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) wrote to both the Minister and Shadow Minister in September highlighting a number of issues under the current system. So far, neither party has acted to fix these problems."

The flaws highlighted by ALSA and AMSA include:

1. The four year time limit, which excludes double-degree law students, who require a minimum of five years to complete their degrees;
2. The ineligibility of full-fee paying students to receive the scholarships. As the liberal government has removed the cap on the number of full-fee places, more students from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds will be forced to take full-fee places in law, and should be eligible for the CLS;
3. Only undergraduate students are eligible for the CLS, meaning that students undertaking a Juris Doctor (JD) degree will be excluded from the scheme. The JD is a degree for students with an undergraduate degree in a discipline other than law; and
4. The discretion given to individual universities to decide whether to allow the same student to receive a Commonwealth Education Scholarship and a Commonwealth Assistance Scholarship. Low socioeconomic students from regional Australia face the same costs of education as those from metropolitan areas, and should be eligible for both scholarships.

"Commonwealth Learning Scholarships are an invaluable resource. However, fixing the current problems is more important than simply extending the number offered.

"While today's measure will encourage more people from regional, indigenous and low socioeconomic backgrounds to enter university, if the above concerns are not addressed, these students will be deterred from entering law, given the length of the degree, competitiveness of entry and its placement in the top HECS band."

Media contact

Mitch Riley
Vice President (Education)
vp_ed@alsa.asn.au
0403 781 992