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4 September 2007

The Hon Julie Bishop MP
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Bishop MP

RE: Commonwealth Learning Scholarships (CLS)

The Australian Law Students' Association (ALSA) and the Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) are concerned by four aspects of the CLS.

Firstly, the four-year maximum duration discriminates against law and medicine students in particular, as combined law degrees require a minimum of five years study, whilst medical courses range between five to six years. Furthermore, the current CLS regime may act as a deterrent to students from a low socioeconomic background wishing to study medicine or law, when combined with the increasingly competitive entry requirements.

Secondly, the ineligibility of postgraduate students to receive the CLS disadvantages students studying postgraduate medicine and law. Under the University of Melbourne's *Growing Esteem* model, from 2008 students will have no choice but to undertake law and medicine as a postgraduate degree, excluding them from the CLS. In numerous universities around Australia, this is already the case for medicine. ALSA and AMSA recommend that postgraduate medicine, Juris Doctor programmes,¹ and Professional Legal Training programmes required for admission to the legal profession should be treated the same way as the 'national priority' degrees, and hence be covered by the CLS. Although some universities allow medical students to obtain the CLS, the CLS regulations prohibit this, and a national, uniform approach is needed.

Thirdly, ALSA and AMSA query the application of the CLS only to Commonwealth Supported Place students. Since the Government has removed the cap on the number of domestic full fee places (which ALSA and AMSA oppose), full fee students will continue to represent an increasing proportion of legal and medical students. This, coupled with the highly competitive entry requirements, and FEE-HELP caps set far lower than the cost of legal or medical degrees at a number of Australian universities, places students from low socioeconomic backgrounds at a further disadvantage. If these students wish to accept a full-fee place to study law or medicine, ALSA and AMSA submit that the Government should support their choice by granting them eligibility to receive the CLS.

¹ Postgraduate law programmes for students who have completed a non-law undergraduate, which, upon graduation, is the equivalent of a bachelor of laws.

Finally, a number of Universities stipulate that a student is only eligible to receive either the Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarship (CECS) or Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship (CAS), but not both. Statistically, rural and regional students are less likely to attend university. They face a multitude of problems not faced by metropolitan students, including access to quality secondary schooling, the prospect of being forced to leave their families and friends to attend university, and the large cost of relocation. It is commendable that the Government offers the CAS to ameliorate this disadvantage, which may somewhat offset the costs of accommodation and relocation; however, it will not offset the costs of education, which the CECS is designed to address. As a result, rural and regional students are considered differently to metropolitan student when allocating CECS. ALSA and AMSA recommend that a national policy allowing regional students to access the CECS as well as the CAS be implemented, to ensure that they are not financially disadvantaged by their education.

We would like to thank you for your time and due consideration of our letter. Please do not hesitate to contact Mitch Riley on 0403 781 992 or vp_ed@alsa.asn.au to discuss any of these matters further, or to arrange a meeting time.

Kind Regards

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