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University cuts deeply unpopular, new polling shows ahead of vote



Australian universities SHUTTERSTOCK



by Andrew Tillett

Almost \$3 billion in university cuts are most unpopular in South Australia, heaping pressure on that state's Senate powerbroker Nick Xenophon to hold the line as the Turnbull government tries to ram legislation through Parliament this week.

New polling by JWS Research commissioned by Universities Australia shows only 16 per cent of voters nationwide support the **\$2.8 billion package**, which includes a 2.5 per cent efficiency dividend for universities and tuition fee increases for students. Sixty-two per cent of voters are outright opposed to the cuts.

Despite Education Minister Simon Birmingham being a South Australian, support for the cuts falls to just one in 10 people in his home state.

Universities Australia chief executive Belinda Robinson said the polling showed the cut was "way out of kilter" with community sentiment.

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Universities Australia chief Belinda Robinson says new polling shows the community is strongly opposed to higher education cuts [Wayne Taylor](#)

"Voters don't want to see cuts to universities – which are key drivers of economic growth – because they create new jobs, reskill Australians and secure \$24 billion a year in export income," she said.

"Universities and their students have already contributed almost \$4 billion to repair the budget over the last six years. Clearly, the Australian community is saying enough is enough: no more uni cuts."

Labor, the Greens and the Nick Xenophon Team are opposed to the cuts but [the government has been pressing NXT's lone lower house MP Rebekha Sharkie to try to get Senator Xenophon to change his stance.](#)

The higher education package is listed for debate in the House of Representatives on Tuesday, with the government hoping to have it voted on in the Senate on Wednesday.

[If the package is defeated](#), the government does not plan to engage in protracted wrangling with the crossbench in the hope of striking a deal and will look elsewhere in the sector for savings.

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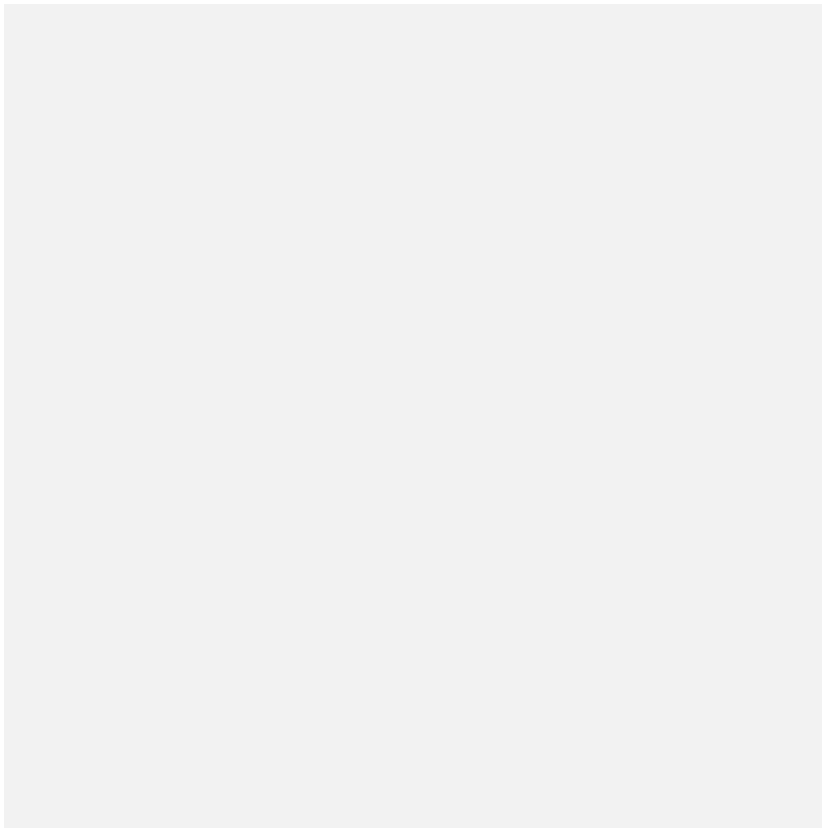
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Senator Birmingham said universities had nothing to fear from the changes.

"What we're proposing is to make a contribution towards repairing the budget deficit, unis face a slightly slower rate of growth over the next four years – funding growth that would still accord, in terms of taxpayer-supported growth, around 23 per cent growth over the next four years," he said.

Opposition education spokeswoman Tanya Plibersek said Labor could not support the package in its entirety but if the government was prepared to spilt its bill there were some elements it could back, such as higher contribution for expensive veterinary and dentistry courses and the uncapping of sub-bachelor courses as long as it did not come at the expense of TAFE funding.

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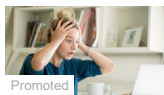
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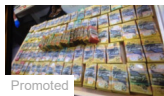
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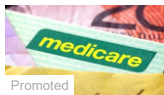
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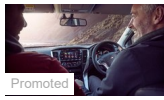


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