



CHASS on Federal Budget

CHASS today (Thursday) welcomed many aspects of the Federal Budget in the areas of education and the arts.

Professor Stuart Cunningham, President of CHASS (the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences), said that the Government's investment in education, training and research targets several important areas of need.

"The Minister is to be congratulated for leading a national reinvestment in the tertiary sector," he said. "We have also seen welcome funding increases in the creative and performing arts and film."

But Professor Cunningham expressed less enthusiasm for some changes in the tertiary sector will operate, labelling them as 'retrograde'.

"We have significant concerns about the new cluster funding system and the reduction in Commonwealth funding for Accounting, Administration, Economics and Commerce, where over \$1,000 has been stripped out of each HECS-funded place.

"It's is hard to understand the rationale for a course of action which will place additional pressure on students and deter them from undertaking these courses.

"It could be on the basis that many of accounting and economics students were expected to end up in high-salary jobs," he said.

Professor Cunningham said general experience had shown that many of these graduates will go on to work in lower-paid parts of the public and community sectors.

He also expressed his disappointment in the minimal cluster funding increase for other disciplines: the humanities, foreign languages and visual and performing arts. The increase here was set at the bare minimum indexation.

"Australia will come regret our diminishing ability to understand and communicate with people in Indonesia, Thailand and China," he said.

"The teaching and learning of languages are important, for trade and aid as well as security, where being able to understand plays an integral role."

He said national security is one of Australia's national research priorities, and that the country was prepared to make huge investments in defence equipment.

"The best forms of defence are the ability to understand and the ability to communicate," he said.

"Investment in teaching and learning is a smart option and complements expenditure in military hardware. Australia can't afford to stand by as our languages capability