

## **Income support reform for research and coursework postgraduate students**

Lack of income support is a significant barrier to postgraduate study. Austudy is not available for higher degree by research (HDR) students or for most postgraduate coursework students.

The AVCC report *Australian University Student Finances 2006* found that full time postgraduate coursework students are among those enduring the most difficult financial circumstances.

This dispels the popular myth that most of these students are already well off. Many postgraduates return to study later in life, often after a career change, with greater carer responsibilities and on-going financial commitments. Add to that the debt load from course fees and you find many struggling just to finish their course of study.

Research students may seem comparatively fortunate in not facing course fees and in cases where they are in receipt of a scholarship. However the reality is that over 60% of research students attempt their degrees without access to any form of income support at all, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Postgraduate students should be provided with income support at a level that enables them to study fulltime. This is a basic matter of equity, as postgraduate study opportunities should not be restricted to the comparatively wealthy or to those few in receipt of scholarships or stipends.

### Key Targets

- Extend eligibility for living allowances (Youth Allowance and Austudy) to all postgraduate courses including research degrees
- Reduce the age of independence for income support from 25 years to 18 years
- Increase the base rates of living allowances (exclusive of all additional assistance) to at least the level of the relevant Henderson Poverty Line.