

MGA Response to the 2026-27 Federal Budget:

MGA is disappointed to see little in this 2026-27 federal budget that benefits current and future graduate students. Graduate students play a vital role in building Australia's research and advanced skills capability across all sectors in the Australian economy, but were severely overlooked in this budget.

No Redress on RTP Stipends:

The budget emphasises the importance of research and development as a key pillar of enhancing Australia's national productivity, but does nothing to address the severe and sustained financial stress PhD students face despite their enormous contribution to both research and teaching activities essential to the university sector.

Evidence reveals one in three research publications are underpinned by the work of PhD students, and that these students contribute over 50% of Australian university research hours. This budget ignores calls from both the government's Universities Australia Accord final report and the Ambitious Australia: Strategic Examination of Research & Development final report, which decidedly call for stipends base rates to be raised.

MGA's own data shows that 60% of Monash's HDR students are "just coping" or "having trouble" financially. Furthermore, 90% of HDR renters are experiencing rental stress. This financial stress leads to significant levels of doubt among students of meeting their completion timeline, the value of their degrees, and many have considered leaving entirely.

This budget represents **a missed opportunity to provide material support to HDR students**, who continue to underpin the entire teaching and R&D ecosystem while living around and below the poverty line.

Graduate Coursework and International Students Overlooked:

This budget also fails to meaningfully impact the graduate coursework and international student cohorts. Structural issues will persist in the sector, eroding education quality by failing to properly fund universities, and by remaining committed to the Job Ready Graduates program which has pushed up costs for students while reducing federal funding.

While this budget references Australia's ongoing skills shortages and long-term skill needs, a lack of bridging to support transitions from study to work means graduates can struggle to secure gainful employment, even in skill shortage industries (particularly for international students). International students are an important pipeline to address some of these issues, but are persistently exploited with exorbitant visa fees and undeserved vilification by politicians and the media.

While increased funding for TEQSA and the National Student Ombudsman is a positive development, this budget has made little material difference to this overlooked and undervalued cohort of students. Given the Treasurer's framing of ambition and risk-taking in delivering a "once in a generation" budget to address increasing intergenerational inequality, it is disappointing to see that this did not extend to addressing long standing policy problems in the higher education sector that impact graduate research and coursework students.

Monash Graduate Association

For media enquiries contact ryan.edwards@monash.edu