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Transparency cuts both ways: the Government should publish higher education funding data

Two weeks after the Government announced The Higher Education Reform Package we are little closer to knowing the funding detail of the full suite of higher education programs for 2018 to 2020.

Just as the higher education sector should be open to scrutiny Government should be able to release forward funding information for its programs. This supports public and university scrutiny, holding the Government accountable for how it uses funds.

In years past the Department of Education made available a table of each program and the funds allocated to it for the current and future calendar years. It is not difficult and it allows us to monitor changes. Previous major funding changes came with a financial impact line for each element.

There are at least 17 distinct elements to the Government's 2017 Package. The 2017 Budget Paper number 2 groups nearly all of it into two lumps obscuring any information about the future funding for each initiative and the programs they affect.

The Department of Education Portfolio Budget Statement provides more data but presented in Government financial years – July to June. Higher Education funding through the *Higher Education Support Act* funds on calendar years, consistent with university operations.

University soothsayers have been hard at work deducing the detail of changes. Fun for those who like such things; frustrating for university heads seeking to understand what is to change; inefficient for university operations, reducing the good use of university resources.

As it stands it is easier to understand how to apply for a university place than the Government funding for it. Universities are working to make the former even easier. The Government should now act on the latter.

END

For comment contact

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