

FACT SHEET
AUSCORPS (Student Volunteer Credits)
Pilot Scheme

PROPOSAL:

To run a 3 year pilot programme in which up to 1,000 students per year can receive a \$10 per hour credit up to a maximum \$2,000 per year against their HECS liability in return for undertaking a maximum 5 hours per week and 200 hours per year of voluntary work. Move to full implementation after successful pilot.

PURPOSE:

To make volunteering more attractive and encourage the development of the next generation of Australia's volunteers.

BACKGROUND:

Those who have been given opportunity through education have a great responsibility to build and contribute to the community. The Coalition will encourage these students to join a new volunteer army to be known as AUSCORPS. The student volunteer credits are not designed to replicate wages or turn volunteering into a paid activity. Instead this initiative is about encouraging more young people to take up volunteering in the hope that they will continue their commitment throughout their adult lives. AUSCORPS will provide further support for not-for-profit organisations and will reinforce the broader value of community service as well as extending the principle of mutual obligation.

The idea was raised by Mitch Fifield in his maiden speech in 2004. It was also an idea at the "2020 Summit" of 2008 and was picked out by Kevin Rudd as one of the top ideas – but, like so many good ideas under Labor, it went nowhere.

HOW IT WOULD WORK:

Eligibility – Full-time domestic students in an undergraduate HECS place.

Registration – Electronically via a website. First-come, first-served basis until all places are filled. Student has their place confirmed upon verification of their details with their university.

Eligible Voluntary Work – Organisations and activities to be eligible would be finally determined after consultation with the not-for-profit and voluntary sector. However, political activism and advocacy would be excluded. The charitable activities of religious organisations would be eligible, but the conduct of religious ceremonies would not (e.g. serving as a cantor

in a church service not eligible). Some of the activities that would be eligible would include coaching a junior footy team, serving as a scout leader, planting trees, meals on wheels, soup kitchens, serving on the board of a not-for-profit, SES work/training, CFA work/training. It is envisaged that the activity would be regular.

Minimum Commitment & Work Block Claiming – To ensure participants make a substantial and serious commitment to volunteering, students will be required to complete a minimum of 50 hours of voluntary work in the course of a year to receive any credits. Further, to reduce administration, claiming for hours thereafter will be in blocks of 25 hours. So for example, a student who completes only 40 hours will receive no credits. A student who completes 130 hours will receive credit for 125 hours, as they have completed the 50 hour minimum plus 3 further blocks of 25 hours.

Claiming – The student lodges a simple form with the ATO. ATO processes the HECS credit. Documentary evidence (e.g. a standard form filled out and signed by the relevant office-bearer of the voluntary organisation) to be submitted with the claim to verify the hours worked by the student. ATO to audit as part of their normal tax auditing processes.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Consultation and programme design to be completed and in place for a 1 January 2012 commencement date.

COST: \$7 million over 4 years