Melbourne Uni's $200,000 medical degree

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STUDENTS who fail to win a regular place in Melbourne University's new medical and dental degrees will have the option of paying more than $200,000 to secure a full-fee paying place.

Student groups attacked the university, accusing it of closing off courses to school leavers in order to circumvent the federal government's ban on charging full fees to Australian undergraduates.

Universities remain free to charge Australian students full fees for postgraduate courses.

The university yesterday announced details of the new courses, which will accept their first intakes next year.

The courses are part of its Melbourne Model, under which it is dramatically reducing the number of undergraduate courses and allowing entry to professional degrees such as medicine, law and architecture only to students who have already earned another degree.

The university will offer 270 Commonwealth-supported places in the four-year doctor of medicine degree, up from the 230 government-subsidised medicine places the university offers at present. These students will pay about $9000 a year. An additional 60 places will be shared between international students, who will pay $60,000 a year, and full-fee paying Australian students, who will pay $51,000 a year. International students who have completed Melbourne University's new biomedicine or science degrees will pay $55,000 a year.

The same fees will apply to the doctor of dental surgery degree. But full-fee paying students will outnumber publicly subsidised students, who will make up only 25 of 90 places.

The doctor of physiotherapy degree will take 80 students next year, 70 publicly subsidised who will pay about $7800 annually. Full-fee paying places will cost $29,000 a year for Australian students, $36,000 a year for international students and $33,000 for overseas students who complete Melbourne's biomedicine or science degrees.

The president of the National Union of Students, Carla Drakeford, said Melbourne University's announcement set a worrying precedent that raised doubts over the future accessibility of higher education.

President of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Tammi Jonas said the fees Melbourne was charging were "well beyond what we would consider a reasonable burden".

She said the course had the potential to make the health system more expensive, as health professionals were forced to pursue higher earnings to repay "crippling" debts.

But the university's dean of medicine, dentistry and health sciences, Professor James Angus, said Melbourne fees were comparable to those charged by some other Australian universities. The University of Queensland charges about $50,000 a year for its medical degree, while the private Bond University charges $273,000 for its medicine course.

He said the university had to offer fee-paying places to cross-subsidise the education of other students, because government funding and student contributions did not cover costs.

This story was found at: ***http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/melbourne-unis-200000-medical-degree-20100503-u3ur.html***