

Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Education
190 Gray Street
Hamilton, VIC 3300

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BY EMAIL: dan.tehan.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

I write on behalf of the Board of the Australian Society of Authors (**ASA**). The ASA is the peak industry body and membership association for Australian writers and illustrators.

As part of your Job-ready Graduates Package of reforms to higher education, announced on 19 June, you have proposed to redesign the Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for students in Commonwealth supported places. This proposal will reduce the government contribution for some courses (arts, society and culture, law, economics, creative arts and communications) and increase the government contribution for others (science, engineering, health, agriculture, education and nursing).

As you know, the contribution required from students in some arts degrees (depending on subject selection) will increase by 113%.

I understand the policy reasoning behind this proposal is that the Government hopes to “deliver more Job-ready graduates in the disciplines and regions where they are needed most and help drive the nation’s economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”.

I write to express the ASA’s grave concerns over this proposal.

Does the Government have any evidence that a degree in the humanities does not deliver job-ready graduates? Has there been any research which indicates that graduates of arts, society and culture, law, creative arts and communications are disproportionately represented in unemployment figures?

The ASA deeply believes in the enormous benefits of a broad-based liberal arts education. Universities are not job factories, although they certainly equip students with skills for their careers and lives. With respect, it is a particularly narrow-minded and vocational view of higher education to suggest that studying history will lead to a career in teaching history. Indeed, numbers from the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia reported by the Sydney Morning Herald indicated that two out of three chief executives of ASX200 listed companies have degrees in the humanities. 62% of government senior executives and 66% of federal parliamentarians also have degrees in the humanities including yourself and former Prime

Ministers Robert Menzies, John Gorton, Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, John Howard, Tony Abbott, Kevin Rudd, Malcolm Turnbull and Julia Gillard.

It is very hard to know what the jobs of the future will look like. We certainly know that the days of 'a job for life' are over; we know that the next generation will have multiple careers, and will need to be equipped with skills that are transferable across industries, as well as possess ingenuity, adaptability and imagination. Studying philosophy, history, anthropology, design, politics, law, art and communications imparts a broad range of skills to students, including creative and critical thinking, problem solving, research and communication skills.

We understand the critical importance of STEM subjects and the projected labour shortages in nursing, engineering and teaching. However, in our view, discounting some university courses is not an adequate solution to these problems. For example, investing in job creation for scientists and better wages for engineers, nurses and teachers will do much more to attract graduates into these fields.

According to the PWC Report, *The economic contribution of Australia's copyright industries – 2006 – 2018* prepared for the Australian Copyright Council, in 2018 the copyright industries contributed \$124.1 billion to the Australian economy, equivalent to 6.8% of Australia's GDP. This part of the economy employs more people than finance and four times the number of people in coal mining.

We object to the devaluing of the study of humanities implicit in the government's proposal. For those students who have a genuine interest or talent in the arts, it is not only punitive to more than double the cost of these courses but also discriminatory. By doubling fees, matching the cost of degrees in medicine, you are committing those students to a sizeable debt. As you will know, not only are the arts perilously underfunded, but many arts workers can expect to earn very little for their work. What may take a qualified doctor a few years to pay back in HECS debts, may take arts workers decades. Raising fees risks locking out the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities from the arts altogether, at a time where greater diversity and a plurality of voices is needed. You've noted that 'no current student will be worse off' under this policy. That may be true, but future students most certainly will.

Studying the humanities is fundamental to a creative and curious country, able to examine its past and reimagine its future. It should not be the preserve of the elite but, instead, remain accessible to all qualifying students. We request you urgently abandon the proposed fee increases.

Yours sincerely,

Olivia Lanchester
CEO