

Dear Minister Tehan

We, Dr Julia Prendergast and Distinguished Professor Jen Webb, write to you on behalf of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing in Australasia. The AAWP was established in 1996 to advance teaching and research in writing in Australasia and has, throughout the years, supported staff and students in creative and critical practice, interdisciplinary research, engagement and education.

We are writing in relation to the impact of the proposed job ready legislation on creative arts degrees. The legislation would effectively mean that an arts and humanities education is unaffordable for everyday Australians.

In creative writing, as well as the visual and performing arts, students learn how to think and interact both creatively and collaboratively. This is important to government and business, as evidenced by a number of recent reports including:

- the Australian Public Service Commission report, which **identifies creative thinking and collaborative strategies as key to addressing wicked problems** [Australian Public Service Commission 2012 Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective (31 May)];
- both the 2016 Global Innovation Strategy [Commonwealth of Australia 2019 National Innovation & Science Agenda, PMC, Australian Government] and the 2019 National Innovation and Science Agenda [DIIS 2016 Global Innovation Strategy, Department of Industry, Australian Government], **which identify the need to advance Australia through culture and collaboration;**
- the Australian Industry Group, which describes Australia as ‘at the back of the OECD pack in collaboration’ and **calls for creativity and interconnectedness, nationally and internationally, to boost the economy** [Australian Industry Group 2016 Joining Forces: Innovation Success Through Partnerships, Melbourne: AiGroup].

Degrees in creative writing and the visual and performing arts are not specifically vocational in design, given that despite the very large contribution to the economy made by the creative and cultural industries, there are few jobs advertised for artists. However, data shows that (a) these graduates move quickly into employment and (b) are capable of delivering significant benefits to their employers because of their capacity to engage creatively with both problems and opportunities.

The increasing trend, in Australia and internationally, for health, STEM and business organisations to collaborate with creative writers and visual and performing artists, shows the value of such training to advance knowledge, enrich community wellbeing, and supporting the economy. Examples include:

- the Consortium for Dark Sky Studies in the USA, which includes poets, artists, technology experts and physicists;
- the Defence ARRTS project in the ACT, which brings together creative artists and mental health experts to address the problem of PTSD among Australian returned service personnel;
- the United Artists Project/Micah Project in Queensland, where artists and disability workers collaborate to support improvements in mental and physical health, employability and housing;
- ArtAngel in the UK, which combines business/investment and artists to build projects that improve communities and wellbeing.

Many other projects in Australia and abroad combine creative writers, as well as visual and performing artists to work with our aging population, people with mental illness, people with addiction, and other in-need groups, supporting their recovery and/or wellness, their ability to live worthwhile lives, and reducing the cost to the economy of groups and individuals who would otherwise need significantly more care, and be unable to contribute to society and the economy.

Examples from our current professional practice include:

- Storytelling and drawing workshops with clients in drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs;
- A neuroimaging study using creative writing research to investigate the brain's microstates with potential applications in the health sphere, including in autism spectrum disorders as well as anxiety and depression (in epidemic proportions in contemporary Australian youth);
- Storytelling workshops with the frail elderly living in residential care;
- Creative writing workshops with drought-affected farmers and pastoralists in rural NSW, and with bushfire-damaged communities along the NSW South Coast.

As well as such projects, graduates of creative arts degrees show excellent employment outcomes, as evidenced by a recent Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal data (GOS-L 2017) which shows a steady increase in labour force participation by these graduates. For those who added studies in humanities, social sciences or science to their creative studies, the rates of fulltime employment, three years after graduation, is slightly higher than for graduates who did not include any creative units in their study (63.8% for creative graduates; 63.2% for others). These graduates are also marginally less likely to be unemployed (6.5%) than those who did not include any creative study in their degree (6.6%).

What this shows is that graduates of creative arts degrees are, in fact, already job ready, and the proposed changes to the HESA Act will only harm the nation's economy, and its capacity to innovate in the face of rapid change. We need creative and critical thinkers from all walks of life in government, business, health and STEM sectors. Crucially, we need thinkers across disciplines, including creative disciplines, to work together. This is not possible if creative degrees are unaffordable for most Australians.

Please support choice and equity in higher education.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'J Prendergast' and the signature on the right is 'J Webb'.

Dr Julia Prendergast, AAWP Chair (Swinburne University, Melbourne) and
Distinguished Professor Jen Webb, AAWP Treasurer (University of Canberra, ACT)

Australasian Association of Writing Programs
LPO Box 5107UC, Bruce, ACT 2617
info@aawp.org.au

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