



historycouncilnsw

17 August 2020

The Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Education
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission on the exposure draft for the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020

The History Council of New South Wales is pleased to take up this opportunity to make a submission on the exposure draft for the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020.

We strongly oppose the proposed increase in the cost of Humanities degrees, including degrees in History, the price of which would more than double for students. We particularly resist the contention that these majors do not produce “job-ready” graduates. No evidence is produced to support this claim, and much is available to contradict it.

The opening statement of the “Job-ready Graduates Discussion Paper” (p. 3) reads “A strong economic recovery will depend on knowledge-intensive jobs held by Australians who are highly skilled, creative and flexible.” On this point we do agree, wholeheartedly, and we know that History graduates hold just these attributes.

The study of history equips graduates with valuable sets of skills in at least two domains. The first is a set of practical transferable skills in research, analysis of differing points of view, critical reading and the clear communication of an evidence-based position. The other skill set prepares history graduates to work harmoniously and productively with people from diverse cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. The study of history produces an open mindedness, social awareness and broad perspective much needed in the forecast growth areas of education, health, construction and science and technology, and across the society and economy.

To quote the History Council of Victoria submission, with which we concur: “The proposed fee increases are an extraordinary and unprecedented initiative to dissuade students from studying History at a time when we can hardly over-estimate the civic importance of a perspective which emphasizes cultural understanding, careful judgement, flexibility of outlook and respect for difference. In a multi-cultural society in a globalising world, that is fundamental.”

Adjustment to the cost of courses is a weak instrument with which to attempt to influence course selection, as students are buffered in the short term by the HECS system of delayed payment. However, in the longer term, a more costly degree will mean that they have less take home pay and cannot get on with their lives as homeowners and parents as quickly as they otherwise would and as governments would want their citizens to do. Humanities could become the preserve of the better off rather than a viable option for all with the interest and talent to pursue this demanding area of study. Just as importantly it creates perverse incentives which undermine students' right to a free and fair choice in their studies.

We recommend that rather than reducing public funding and so dramatically increasing the percentage of costs of tertiary education borne by individual students, the government commit to higher levels of funding for the sector, to place it on a similar footing to primary and secondary education as a public good which is available to all for the benefit of the whole society.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Gapps'.

Dr Stephen Gapps
President, History Council of NSW

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