



Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

9 September 2020

Dear Senate Education and Employment Committee:

The Development Studies Association of Australia represents academics, researchers, practitioners and students in the field of Development Studies, and is formally registered under the Victorian Associations Act. As an interdisciplinary field of study that draws upon disciplines across the Social Sciences and Humanities in order to understand and seek solutions to national and global challenges (such as poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, social injustice), we have grave concerns about several elements of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020.

In particular, we submit that the proposal to increase the fees of most HASS disciplines by 113%, and to reduce the overall funding per student available to students, will have detrimental impacts on Australia's ability to face the challenges of the 21st Century in ways that are fair, just, and that ensure the well-being of future generations.

We share the concerns already expressed by academic colleagues as to:ⁱ

- the lack of evidence base providing a rationale for the changes;
- an alarming discourse that falsely projects HASS graduates as less job-ready than Science, Technology and Maths (STEM) graduates: a discourse which contradicts both the Australian Graduate Outcomes survey and the demand for Arts degrees by employees as argued by the World Economic Forum and business leaders in Australia;ⁱⁱ
- the deleterious impact on the capacity of universities to provide a quality learning experience for students due to reduced funding;

In addition to these important points, we wish to highlight from the perspective of Development Studies the potentially negative consequences of this policy for future generations of Australians.

Technical and scientific interventions fail if social and cultural considerations are ignored

Experience has demonstrated that technological and scientific interventions in agriculture, health, infrastructure can fail, or are less effective, if they do not take into account an understanding of cultures, social relations, power and politics, local histories and transnational connections. Development Studies as a field has revealed the often unequal and inequitable outcomes, and adverse consequences of ignoring socio-historic conditions in aid and development programs. These lessons are equally applicable when considering scientific and technological interventions in Australia. Development Studies views STEM and HASS as necessarily interconnected, and both must be invested in if we want to face the challenges of effective and sustainable futures.

A political class and public service unrepresentative of Australia's population

Ample evidence points to the need for elected representatives and public servants in government departments to be broadly representative of the people that they serve.ⁱⁱⁱ Data shows that an Arts degree is the most common qualification of people holding such positions. We are concerned that disincentivising these degrees for people from a diversity of life experiences, will result in an even more homogenous, elite and unrepresentative political and decision-making class. We need leaders familiar



with the struggles of everyday Australians, and knowledgeable about diverse Australian and global cultures and histories.

The need for qualified workers for a growing Humanitarian and Development Sector

The Development and Humanitarian field is likely to see significant growth in need and employment opportunities in coming years, with the impacts of Covid-19, population growth and climate change driving large numbers of people into more vulnerable situations globally, and fuelling intra-state and inter-state conflict. International and national non-government organisations, multilateral agencies and private sector companies require graduates with the skills and knowledge to effectively work in this sector. Graduates of Australian Development Studies courses are extremely ‘job-ready’, and penalising students opting for job-ready courses in a growing, charity-focussed profession like this—with \$50,000 degree debts—is counterproductive in every way.

Detrimental to Australia’s position and relations in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond

Graduates from Humanities and Social Sciences—including Development Studies—are critical to Australia’s ability to maintain mutually beneficial relations within the Indo-Pacific that advance our national strategic interests. Mutual understanding, effective communication, and cultural literacy are all critical to the ability of Australians to work with our partners in the Indo-Pacific. While we welcome the reduction in fees for language training, we agree with the Asian Studies Association of Australia that HASS courses are essential for students to “learn about the societies using those languages and acquire the contextual knowledge needed to make their language skills useful in the job market”.

Inequitable burden placed on youth

From young voters’ perspective, the fee change means they now must pay up to 90%. This is a shocking increase, which is especially traumatic for current students who have endured a year of interrupted studies due to COVID-19. This change in fee structure means future generations of young Australians will have no choice but to shoulder the major burden of the detrimental economic impact of responses to COVID-19, and an impending global economic recession. Rather than unfairly place the burden on the next generation, the Government should make higher education accessible for all, in recognition that young people are the future of this country.

In sum, we condemn the use of the COVID-19 crisis to ostensibly ‘rationalise’ deeply damaging higher educational reform targeting the humanities and social sciences. We see grave costs and consequences for this action, and urge the minister to reconsider.

Sincerely

Associate Professor Tanya Jakimow, President, DSAA
Associate Professor Bina Fernandez, Vice President DSAA
Associate Professor Anthony Ware, Secretary DSAA
Dr Joyce Wu, Treasurer DSAA
Dr Nichole Georgeou, DSAA Committee member
Dr Kearrin Sims, DSAA Committee member
Dr Philippa Smales, DSAA Committee member
Dr Rochelle Spencer, Committee member
Lauren Tynan, Committee member
Dr Vicki Ware, DSAA Committee member

ⁱ https://www.aas.asn.au/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=143481&module_id=404873;
<https://www.chass.org.au/media-releases/letter-from-hass-associations-opposing-changes-to-hass-degree-fees/>

ⁱⁱ <https://theconversation.com/if-the-government-listened-to-business-leaders-they-would-encourage-humanities-education-not-pull-funds-from-it-141121>

ⁱⁱⁱ Case in point, the esteemed former Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Peter Sherbold, had an undergraduate degree in Political Science and American studies.