

Re discontinuation of VET Student Loans for Christian Ministry courses and related disciplines

I was disappointed and shocked to learn that Government loans will no longer be available to students from 2017 onward wishing to study Christian ministry courses, including Christian studies, youth work, pastoral care, pastoral counselling and chaplaincy.

I noted that some of the criteria include: "whether the skills were in demand, whether the course would assist the student to gain employment":

1. Since all people die and a service or ceremony of burial, including prayers and honouring the dead as well as disposing of the bodily remains with dignity is conducted in most cases having people to perform this service is in high demand. They are employed to do so. Having a trained, rather than an untrained person is preferred for this important and sensitive act.
2. Death causes grief to those who are related or close to the deceased, therefore it is advisable to have trained compassionate persons available to provide pastoral care and counselling to the bereaved. Once again affecting 100% of the population.

I urge you to make VET Student Loans available to students training for the above services.

3. The Australian law 1961 regarding the definition of marriage as you are aware is:

"Marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Certain unions are not marriages. A union solemnised in a foreign country between: (a) a man and another man; or (b) a woman and another woman; must not be recognised as a marriage in Australia. ^[3]

I suspect you are also aware that this definition is a Christian value, as well as being a traditional practice and value since the beginning of time. Since marriage celebrants need to be registered in order to perform marriage services and there are laws pertaining to this employment I put it to you that training is necessary to equip them for this role. Not all people have the means, or have rich relatives to provide the necessary finance for this training.

I therefore urge you to make VET Student Loans available to such students.

4. The Liberal Government under John Howard's leadership implemented a very worthy Chaplaincy scheme in public schools. Most of these chaplains are Christians who provide help to thousands of students regards of race or creed (or lack thereof)The approval rate for this service is very high:

SU (Scripture Union) Qld reported Schools overwhelmingly approve school chaplaincy

School chaplaincy valued: A 2009 national study into the effectiveness of chaplaincy in government schools found that:

- **98% of principals** surveyed said that chaplaincy was making a major contribution to school morale; it was proactive, unique, effective and important.
- **92% of principals** surveyed felt it was highly important to continue to have a chaplain serving in their schools;
- **73% of students** surveyed felt their chaplain was highly important in the school. In talking about what was most important about the chaplain, many students referred to the chaplain's accessibility; Most staff and parents interviewed were concerned about whether there would be ongoing government funding for chaplains.

Major issues school chaplains deal with: In the two weeks prior to the survey,

- **92.5%** of chaplains reported dealing with bullying and harassment;
- **92%** of chaplains reported dealing with peer relationships and loneliness;
- **91%** of chaplains reported dealing with family relationships;
- **85%** of chaplains reported dealing with students' sense of purpose and self-esteem.

The special contribution of school chaplaincy: The research found the contribution of chaplains to school welfare was unique in a number of ways. They worked proactively to enhance students wellbeing, rather than responding to problems that arise. Students see them as different from other school staff, as 'neutral' or 'non-aligned', partly because they do not have a teaching or disciplinary role. Chaplains approach welfare holistically, working with families and communities as well as individual students.

Research: This 2009 national study of the effectiveness of chaplaincy in government schools was undertaken for the National School Chaplaincy Association (NSCA) by Dr Philip Hughes of Edith Cowan University and Prof Margaret Sims of the University of New England.

I urge you to make VET Student Loans available to students who wish to be employed as School chaplains or counsellors.

While some training is conducted by denominational colleges, not all students wish to be aligned to a particular denomination. They wish to have general Christian training. Not all students belong to large churches with central funds for training. Many small congregations pull above their weight when it comes to community service and training as school chaplains or voluntary pastoral care workers or counsellors, some helping migrants and refugees settle meaningfully into society. Please do not underestimate the vast hours contributed to Australian society by volunteers, many of whom are Christian, who save the

Government millions of dollars by giving their services –they are needed and employed but not paid!

5. There is need to have practical training available for Australian citizens in general pastoral work in the Vet sector. Many country areas are now without a pastor/minister/priest leading to more isolation and lack of support in already under-resourced areas. The more practically trained could be employed part time in pastoral work and part time in other occupations to become financially viable. While there are increasing numbers of overseas pastors in Australia doing pastoral work and church planting adding variety and flavour there also needs to be “home grown” pastors who understand Australian conditions and psyche.

I therefore urge you to make VET Student Loans available to students of Christian Ministry and Theology courses.

6. Prevention of suicide training needed in counselling, pastoral care and youth work.

Below please see Suicide Data 2015 – Released in September 2016 of the Hunter Mental Health organization. “prevention is better”

The proportion of deaths attributed to suicide varies greatly among age groups¹ with a much greater percentage of the total causes of death attributed to suicide in younger age groups. This variation reflects considerably lower number of deaths in younger people, and the greater proportion of deaths by other causes in older people.

Age groups	Suicide as a percentage of all deaths	
	Males	Females
15-19	28.6	33.9
20-24	37.9	31.4
25-29	33.8	24.9
30-34	27.9	17.8
35-39	23.6	13.2
40-44	18.4	9.1
45-49	13.5	7.3

50-54	8.7	4.4
55-59	4.2	2.8
60-64	2.4	1.2
65-69	1.6	0.6
70-74	1.0	0.5
75-79	.06	0.2
80-84	0.4	0.2
85+	0.3	0.0
Total	2.8	0.9

As you can see from this chart suicide affects all age groups but of particular concern are the younger age groups. I agree with the Hunter institute –It is better to “Put prevention first”. There are so many young people lacking good role models, facing long term unemployment, coping with parental divorce and their own identity and purpose in life, including the lack of spiritual input and meaning that they need better role models and more support provided by trained youth workers.

The Research Report | November 2015 from the Centre for Independent Studies conducted by Dr Patrick Carvalho reveals the following:

The rising youth unemployment problem

- Every year a large number of young Australians aged 15–24 enter the labour market but quickly discover that finding a job is tough and keeping one is not getting easier.
- Youth unemployment has nearly doubled since mid- 2008, with around 300,000 youth now unemployed in Australia, accounting for over a third of total unemployment.
- Youth unemployment has averaged 13.5% in the past 12 months, more than twice the adult unemployment rate.
- Full-time youth employment positions have been severely reduced for both teenagers and early 20s in the past seven years, with current levels still below the pre-GFC period.
- Worse still, two-thirds of the recent surge in youth unemployment rates was due to the increased number of teenagers looking for part-time jobs.
- Many of the 360,000 young Australians who are currently not in employment, education or training — also known as NEETs — are not even being technically classified as unemployed, because they are not actively looking for a job.
- Data shows that, although the number of teenager NEETs aged 15–19 has been in sharp decline due to higher Year 12 attainments, the number of early 20s NEETs aged 20–24 has solidly grown since the GFC, reaching the highest peak since 2003.

While it is beyond my scope here to address wider issues related to employment opportunities I would like to suggest that youth unemployment and lack of support contribute to feelings of uselessness, depression and suicide. This is where youth groups, including pastoral care and spiritual education make a different long term to a person's life, starting when they are young. Do we really want a dysfunctional, wasted generation?

When I typed "Skills employers are looking for" into my search engine this is what came up:

Top 10 Qualities and Skills Employers are Looking For

- Communication Skills. ...
- Honesty. ...
- Technical Competency. ...
- Work Ethic. ...
- Flexibility. ...
- Determination and Persistence. ...
- Ability to Work in Harmony with Co-Workers. ...
- Eager and Willing to Add to Their Knowledge Base and Skills.

These are the very attributes that Christian colleges teach in many of their courses in addition to the core theology or other subject matters.

- Let me give you an example from my own family. One of my grandsons studied business and theology together. Not a usual choice but he managed to obtain employment at a university as soon as he left college. While there he discovered some discrepancies and decided to investigate. One of those lines of enquiry led him to believe that certain missing equipment was being misplaced and/or stolen so he decided to investigate thoroughly. There were certain obstacles he encountered along the way but his Christian conviction and determination and courage caused him to pursue the matter until it was resolved in court resulting in tracing stolen goods worth a large sum of money and a change of practice saving the institution from ongoing fraud. The skills necessary for this task have been mentioned but they also cover the first four on the above chart.

I would like to add here that while fraud investigation comes under the heading of Police work it is a matter for society as a whole and ethics is high on the Christian education agenda. If you want to save government money, then getting rid of fraud is one way of dealing with the wastage.

I am in favour of good financial management by this Federal Government and acknowledge the need to review and, where necessary, prune the budget and deal with the dishonest institutions appropriately.

I urge you to make VET Student Loans available to students who wish to be employed as Youth workers or honest workers in any area.

7. In conclusion I now humbly wish to raise the matter of religious discrimination with you.

a) While there are many courses to be excluded from VET Student Loans the Christian/Judaeo section of the community seems to be especially excluded. This is religious discrimination against religious and Christian organizations in favour of the humanistic belief system. We have students in our educational institutions paying at their own expense to learn more about the Christian way of life as they have already experienced first-hand the hardships and terrors of Communist China, Poland, Russia and the like.

I am deeply concerned at the undermining of the core values of religious freedom and education, and a “fair go for everyone” in Australia. Please think very carefully before you make this choice of excluding Christian Education from **VET Student Loans**. I don’t think you understand the outcome of such a choice. Some choices have a greater impact on society than others.

Thank you for your kind consideration in reading this submission.

Yours faithfully

Roma Hosking (Pastor)