

## **Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee**

Film and Screen Production Educators Response in support of Higher Education Support Amendment (Reverse Job-Ready Graduates Fee Hikes and End 50k Arts Degrees) Bill 2025

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### **Executive Summary**

- The Jobs Ready Graduates (JRG) framework has increased financial barriers to degrees that underpin Australia's screen production workforce, weakening education-to-employment pathways in a designated growth industry.
- Screen production relies on applied, interdisciplinary and production intensive training models that are misaligned with JRG discipline pricing assumptions.
- Higher student contribution rates under JRG have disproportionately affected students from low socioeconomic, regional and underrepresented backgrounds, narrowing participation in screen aligned degrees.
- Workforce development and equity outcomes are structurally linked: cost barriers that restrict access to industry aligned education directly constrain the future supply and diversity of skilled graduates.
- Evidence from national and Queensland policy settings, frameworks and initiatives indicates a growing demand for screen practitioners while higher education pathways are contracting under JRG.
- The proposed amendment to the JRG legislation provides a targeted mechanism to restore alignment between higher education funding, workforce needs and equity objectives.
- Supporting the amendment would strengthen national skills development, cultural capacity and employment outcomes in a sector of strategic economic and cultural importance.

### **1. Introduction and context**

This submission is provided by the Film, Screen and Animation discipline at QUT in support of the proposed amendment to reverse the Jobs Ready Graduates (JRG) legislation currently before the

Senate. The submission aims to contribute independent, evidence-based analysis to inform the Committee's consideration of whether current JRG settings are achieving their stated objectives in relation to workforce development and equity.

While the JRG framework was introduced to better align higher education funding with labour market outcomes, evidence from the screen production industry – including film, television, documentary and streaming sectors - indicates that its discipline pricing structure has produced unintended consequences and has been detrimental to demand for screen education by prospective students. JRG has increased the cost of degrees that supply skills to a government identified growth industry, while disproportionately constraining access for students from less advantaged backgrounds. These impacts are not separate issues: they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

This submission focuses on screen production as a case study to demonstrate how JRG settings undermine both workforce pipeline development and equity of access. Screen production is a significant case because it is subject to explicit and substantial Commonwealth and state policy support, relies heavily on applied higher education pathways, and requires a diverse and sustained graduate pipeline to meet expanding industry demand.

## **2. Impact on workforce and industry pipelines**

Government policy at both Commonwealth and state levels consistently identifies film, television, post-production, digital and games as priority growth industries requiring a sustained pipeline of skilled graduates (Australian Taxation Office [ATO], 2025; Queensland Government, 2018; Queensland Government, 2025). These policies are not aspirational in nature; they are accompanied by substantial public investment designed to attract production activity, expand employment and build workforce capability.

In Queensland, the *Advance Queensland Screen Industry 10-Year Roadmap and Action Plan* positions the screen sector as a long-term driver of jobs and economic growth, with explicit emphasis on skills development and workforce readiness (Queensland Government, 2018). Subsequent reporting confirms that production attraction initiatives have generated significant employment and economic activity, culminating in a record \$925 million in screen production expenditure in 2024–25 in Queensland (Screen Queensland, 2025). Commonwealth film incentives

administered through the taxation system similarly aim to support international competitiveness and local employment outcomes (ATO, 2025). Over the past five years, production expenditure in the screen industry in Australia has grown from \$1.9 billion dollars in 2020/21 to a record of over \$2.6 billion by 2024/25, above the five-year average of \$2.2 billion and signalling that the industry nationally is growing strongly (Screen Australia, 2025).

Screen workforce development depends heavily on higher education pathways that combine creative practice, technical training and collaborative project-based learning. Degrees in film, screen and related creative disciplines supply graduates across production, post-production, digital and visual effects roles, as well as adjacent fields that feed into screen production. These pathways are labour intensive to deliver and require specialist facilities, equipment and academic expertise.

Against this policy backdrop, **JRG represents a clear misalignment**. By substantially increasing student contribution rates for creative arts, media and communication disciplines, JRG raises the cost of degrees that directly supply the screen workforce. This occurs while government investment is expanding production volume and employment demand. Rather than strengthening workforce readiness, JRG discourages enrolment in relevant degrees and places additional pressure on the sustainability of industry aligned programs.

This misalignment risks creating a structural bottleneck in the workforce pipeline. As production activity expands, the availability of suitably trained graduates becomes increasingly critical. JRG settings, however, currently constrain supply at the point of education and training.

### **3. Equity and access implications across the workforce pipeline**

Equity and workforce impacts under JRG are inseparable. Screen production education is cost sensitive, both for institutions delivering resource intensive programs and for students deciding whether to enrol and persist. Higher student contributions under JRG therefore have a direct effect on who enters the workforce pipeline.

Evidence indicates that JRG has disproportionately affected students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. National reporting shows a decline in enrolments from low SES students since the introduction of JRG, with high-cost disciplines such as the arts particularly affected (Dhanji, 2026).

Research has characterised JRG as contributing to a more stratified higher education system in which cost signals shape participation and exclusion (Patfield et al., 2025).

In screen education, these equity impacts translate into workforce effects. Screen production degrees require intensive participation in group projects, long production days, and engagement with cocurricular and industry linked activities. Increased fees, combined with broader cost of living pressures, push students to undertake longer hours of paid work, reducing their capacity to fully participate in these essential learning experiences. This disproportionately affects students without access to financial support, narrowing the range of students able to engage meaningfully with industry aligned education and training.

The increased financial risk associated with high-cost degrees also affect student behaviour. Screen education depends on experimentation, iteration and creative risk-taking. Evidence indicates that increased financial pressure under the Job-ready Graduates framework shapes more constrained student behaviour in creative disciplines, limiting participation, experimentation and progression through applied learning pathways, with downstream implications for innovation and workforce diversity (Patfield et al., 2025; Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026). Over time, this shapes not only individual outcomes but the character and diversity of the future workforce.

Importantly, reduced participation from low-SES, regional and underrepresented students narrows the diversity of the screen workforce. This has implications beyond equity in education: workforce diversity underpins the capacity of the screen sector to tell a wide range of Australian stories and to remain competitive in global markets. Cost barriers that limit access to training therefore have long-term consequences for both workforce capability and cultural output.

#### **4. Evidence and systemic effects**

The impacts described above are reflected in structural changes across the higher education landscape. Between 2018 and 2025, at least 40 creative arts courses were discontinued nationally, including film and performance adjacent programs at several universities (National Advocates for Arts Education [NAAE], 2025). These reductions are attributed to financial pressures intensified under JRG, particularly for disciplines with high delivery costs and reduced enrolment flexibility.

Course closures have systemic effects on screen workforce development. Screen production does not operate in isolation; it relies on adjacent disciplines such as acting, music, animation, visual arts and writing. The contraction of these programs weakens the broader ecosystem that feeds into screen production, reducing interdisciplinary collaboration and limiting pathways into specialised roles.

At the same time, industry demand continues to grow. Screen Queensland’s production attraction, post-production and attachment programs are explicitly designed to expand employment opportunities and transition emerging practitioners into the workforce (Screen Queensland, 2022; Screen Queensland, 2023; Screen Queensland, n.d.). These initiatives assume the existence of a robust and accessible education pipeline. Where higher education pathways contract, the effectiveness of these programs is undermined.

Research on JRG more broadly suggests that the policy embeds normative assumptions about which disciplines are considered “job ready,” producing exclusionary effects for students whose aspirations or backgrounds do not align with these assumptions (Patfield et al., 2025; Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026). In screen education, this translates into both reduced participation and a diminished sense of legitimacy for creative careers, further discouraging enrolment and persistence.

## **5. Implications for national skills, culture and employment**

The screen sector occupies a distinctive position in Australia’s economy and cultural life. It contributes to employment growth, export income and international engagement, while also shaping national identity and cultural representation. Workforce capacity in this sector therefore has implications that extend beyond individual employment outcomes.

A sustained contraction of education pathways risks increasing reliance on imported labour or limiting Australia’s capacity to service growing production demand. It also risks concentrating opportunities within a narrower, more privileged segment of the population, reducing the diversity of voices and experiences represented on screen.

From a skills perspective, the **misalignment between JRG settings and industry demand represents a policy incoherence**. Governments invest heavily to attract production and build industry capacity,

while higher education pricing discourages participation in the very degrees that supply the workforce. Over time, this disconnect weakens the return on public investment in screen incentives and undermines broader employment objectives.

## **6. Recommendations in support of the proposed amendment**

The proposed amendment to the Jobs Ready Graduates legislation provides a targeted opportunity to address the workforce and equity impacts outlined above. In particular, the amendment would support:

### **1. Improved alignment between higher education funding and labour market demand**

By moderating student contribution rates for screen aligned creative disciplines, the amendment would reduce cost barriers to degrees that supply skills to a designated growth industry, strengthening workforce pipelines.

### **2. Enhanced equity of access to industry aligned education**

Lowering financial disincentives would support participation by students from low SES, regional and underrepresented backgrounds, widening the future workforce and improving long-term skills diversity.

### **3. Greater sustainability of applied and production intensive programs**

More appropriate funding settings would assist universities to maintain resource intensive courses essential to screen training, stabilising the education ecosystem that underpins industry growth.

### **4. Policy coherence across education, industry and employment portfolios**

The amendment would help align higher education pricing with existing Commonwealth and state investments in screen production, improving the effectiveness of public expenditure across the policy system.

**Supporting the proposed amendment would therefore contribute to more effective workforce development, improved equity outcomes, and stronger alignment between higher education policy and national industry priorities.**

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