



**NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
FOR THE
VISUAL ARTS**

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Education and Other Legislation Amendment (Abolishing Indexation and Raising the Minimum Repayment Income for Education and Training Loans) Bill 2022

NAVA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the Education and Other Legislation Amendment (Abolishing Indexation and Raising the Minimum Repayment Income for Education and Training Loans) Bill 2022.

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) is an independent membership organisation which brings together the many voices of the visual arts, craft and design sector to improve the fundamental conditions of work and practice. We do this through advocacy, education and the Code of Practice for the Visual Arts, Craft and Design.

NAVA was established in 1983 as the peak body for the visual arts. Today, our community is made up of over 50,000 members, subscribers, friends and followers, consisting of artists, students, academics, arts workers and arts organisations.

NAVA supports this bill to abolish indexation on student loans and raise the minimum payment income to alleviate cost-of-living pressures on students and graduates.

The longitudinal studies by Professor David Throsby of the economic circumstances of arts practitioners over the last three decades indicate that the level of visual artists' and craft practitioners' incomes continues to drop significantly and that a substantial proportion of practitioners are earning below the poverty line. Studio-based arts courses are highly labour- and materials-intensive, requiring a significant investment in time and resources from the student.

A visual arts and craft sector survey undertaken by NAVA in early 2022 revealed that a majority of Australian visual artists and arts workers are deeply concerned by income security, program cancellations and reduced sales due to ongoing impacts of the pandemic and extreme weather linked to climate change.

The Higher Education Loan Program – previously the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) - is tied to inflation, increasing proportionally in line with the consumer price index (CPI). Inflation is currently growing at 7.8% – the fastest pace since just before the 1990s recession.¹

Andrew Norton, Professor in the Practice of Higher Education Policy at Australian National University, recently explained that inflation reduces the number of student places available because, while both the

¹ Cassidy, C. Inflation-driven higher education debt increases to hit millions of Australians, The Guardian, 28 Jan 2023
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jan/28/inflation-driven-higher-education-debt-increases-to-hit-millions-of-australians>

government and student contributions are indexed to CPI, the total amount that goes to universities is fixed under universities' funding agreements.²

As universities are forced to make difficult decisions in the process of balancing the books, debilitating cuts have been made at all universities targeting the arts and studio-based learning in particular. Course cuts and studio closures will have a deleterious impact on both the number and quality of artists in Australia and may result in severe cultural deficit for Australia. We are not simply losing particular courses and facilities - we are witnessing the erosion of vital sites of experimentation, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and joy. Over time, perhaps few university arts programs will still be accessible, but only to those who can afford the fee increases, who can afford the increased cost of living in city centres, who can afford to not juggle part time work on top of their long studio days. The point of irony that we arrive at is that although conservatives relentlessly deride the arts for being inaccessible and elitist, it is precisely the rising cost of education that makes entering the industry so cut-throat and unsustainable for the vast majority.

Concerningly, Universities Australia have recently reported that the Creative Arts have experienced the largest fall in undergraduate enrolments (-2.0 per cent) and as well as for postgraduate study – by coursework and research (-10.0 per cent).³

Ensuring good educational opportunities for visual artists is one of NAVA's central concerns to enable artists to be well prepared to embark on and progress in their professional careers. Arts training in higher education is key to reaching this objective. Affordable training is just as essential in the arts as in other industries and enables graduates either to establish their own cultural businesses or to be employed by others.

NAVA applauds the government's new National Cultural Policy '[Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place](#)' which asserts that Australian students have the opportunity to receive an education that includes culture, creativity, humanities and the arts.

Again, NAVA supports this bill to abolish indexation on student loans and raise the minimum payment income.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further information I can provide.

Sincerely

Penelope Benton
Executive Director

² Hare, J. Inflation makes rising student debt a political hot potato, Financial Review, 7 July 2022
<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/education/inflation-makes-rising-student-debt-a-political-hot-potato-20220707-p5azv5>

³ 2022 HIGHER EDUCATION FACTS AND FIGURES, Universities Australia July 2022
https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/220207-HE-Facts-and-Figures-2022_2.0.pdf