



Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee

Australian Screen Production, Education and Research Association (ASPERA) response in support of Higher Education Support Amendment (Reverse Job-Ready Graduates Fee Hikes and End 50k Arts Degrees) Bill 2025

Date: 8 April 2026

Executive Summary

This submission highlights the negative impacts of Jobs Ready Graduates (JRG) policy on screen production higher education. In the points below we outline impacts for the screen production education classroom and broader ramifications for the Australian screen industry. We note that JRG policy has negatively affected the diversity of screen production education cohorts, with implications for the future diversity of screen storytelling as well as the stability of the screen sector.

Introduction

This submission has been drafted by the Executive of the Australian Screen Production, Education and Research Association (ASPERA) in support of the proposed amendment to reverse the JRG legislation that is currently before the Senate. The submission's authors are active screen production educators who have experienced changes brought about by the policy first-hand. We make this submission to express our concerns regarding equity of access to screen production education and the future of higher education pathways into industry.

About ASPERA

Established in 2004, ASPERA represents 25 Australian and New Zealand higher education institutions offering qualifications at undergraduate and/or postgraduate levels, including bachelor, master and doctoral degrees in various screen production disciplines. ASPERA plays an active role in shaping quality education for those working or planning to work in production or research for the screen. It addresses issues of concern to the sector, and the status of screen production courses within the education sector. It also addresses the relationship between the screen production education sector and the wider Australian screen industries.

ASPERA lifts the profile of screen-based industries for the wider economic, social and cultural development of Australia. Most recently, our annual conference has provided a forum for screen production educators and researchers to develop their expertise in areas of creativity, experimentation, and criticality in the curriculum, exploring issues such as how to address the challenges and opportunities posed by generative AI tools, 'big tech' social and streaming platforms, and how to develop a diverse, equitable, and inclusive screen workforce and cultures. Keynote speakers in recent years have included Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO FASSA FAHA FAAL, Professor Roger Dean, Uncle Bruce Pascoe, and screen industry leaders Brigid Ikin (Felix Media), Associate Professor Pauline Clague (UTS, Winda Film Festival), Lisa Scott (Highview Productions), Sue Maslin AO (AusFilm, Film Media Art), Matthew Deaner (SPA), and Sharon Strickland (Dendy).

Key points

- **Fewer students from marginal backgrounds in screen production courses**

As educators, we have seen a decline in the diversity of screen production student cohorts that corresponds with the introduction of JRG policy. This includes fewer students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students from regional locations and underrepresented groups. The high cost of screen production degrees in line with JRG policy is an equity issue that directly affects the next generation of screen practitioners. When we ask young people why they aren't coming to study these once popular degrees they tell us that they can't afford to start adult life carrying such a huge debt. Conceptually, they know that they could come to university to study screen production and media, but when faced with such a large bill they don't feel able to follow this path. The exclusionary message received by some students is thus that screen production education (and a future career in the screen sector) is 'not for the likes of them'.

Students who *do* study screen production are often managing significant employment alongside their studies, which restricts their available time for experimentation and creative development—activities that are vital to the discipline. This has ramifications beyond the students' own experience of career success and sustainability, considering retention of workers and the wasted cost of training. JRG policy compounds this problem by adding to students' financial burden.

- **Loss of diverse screen storytelling and risks for national cultural identity**

We are witnessing the impact of JRG as a loss of diverse stories about our culture, leading to a disconnection in the engendering of our national identity. This conflicts with the Australian Government's *Revive Cultural Policy* (2023) pillar of reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture. Screen storytelling enables cultural understanding that fosters tolerance, respect, cross-cultural communication, and social cohesion. The loss of diverse storytellers therefore has impacts far beyond the issue of who is

enabled to participate in screen production, diminishing the potential of screen stories as communication tools across all industries.

We would like the Senate Enquiry to consider the value of the stories that might have been told by these lost students. These are often stories of migration, of transition, of hope and of resilience. We mourn the loss of these voices on our screens, in our magazines, our books, our galleries and in our ears. This will be a deep and enduring loss for Australia, but it needs to be recognised that this is a deliberate choice that has been made to exclude these voices. The rhetoric doesn't match the reality and we consider this to be one of the great shames of our era.

- **Negative impacts for the Australian screen sector workforce**

JRG discipline pricing has been determined by assumptions around workforce needs and labour shortages. In recent years, reports have highlighted skills shortages in a variety of screen production crew roles, which have ramifications for the future productivity and sustainability of the Australian screen industry (AusFilm 2022, 2023). The JRG policy amplifies this critical issue by reducing the pool of future entrants for both key creative and technical crew positions, making the industry potentially reliant on international labour to fill shortfalls.

Profound technical change has informed the screen sector and the broader creative industries in recent times, driven by advances in artificial intelligence (AI). Screen production students are encouraged to develop a critical awareness of new technologies and consequently, they bring a measure of criticality in regards to developments, perceived challenges and opportunities. This expertise is diminished when there are fewer screen production education graduates in circulation.

- **Negative impacts for broader Creative Industries workforces**

Further to workforce needs, we note that screen production graduates are inherently interdisciplinarity, entering a variety of creative sectors. As such, they offer more to creative industries and other fields of employment than vocational skills and industry-engaged knowledge, but also present with well developed soft skills in areas such as teamwork and leadership. Graduate outcomes for many of our member institutions point to the need for screen production discipline skills and knowledge in sectors beyond the screen industry. A loss of students in our field therefore has consequences beyond fewer skilled screen practitioners in future.

The production of stories for the screen is an activity that requires creative, technical and logical minds. To succeed in the screen sector, creators must understand how various technologies and platforms are used to produce content while also being attuned to how humans engage with this content. Screen producers develop an understanding of how stories have always been told in order to position themselves one step ahead of trends. Producers need to know the economics of intercultural global networks of exchange and interchange work. These are skills

that cannot be replicated by machines or robots. These skills are transferable and they sit at the heart of what it is to be human. We would suggest that fewer students with these skills, and less diverse students as a result of JRG policy, is a loss for Australian society.

References

Ausfilm. (2022). National Cultural Policy Submission.

<https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/ncp1098-ausfilm.pdf>

Ausfilm. (2023). Ausfilm's Research Report to the Workforce Capacity Working Group

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Australian Government. (2023). *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*- National Cultural Policy. <https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>

ASPERA Member Organisations

Adelaide University

Auckland University of Technology

Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS)

Australian Performing Arts Conservatory (APAC)

Bond University

Curtin University

Deakin University

Edith Cowan University

Excelsia University College

Flinders University

Griffith University

JMC Academy

Macquarie University

Monash University

Murdoch University

Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)

SAE University College

Swinburne University of Technology

University of Newcastle

University of Southern Queensland

University of the Sunshine Coast

University of Wollongong

University of Technology Sydney

Victorian College of the Arts (VCA)