



Committee Secretary
Education and Employment Legislation Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

4 April 2026

Dear Secretary

Re: Inquiry: The Higher Education Support Amendment (Reverse Job-Ready Graduates Fee Hikes and End 50k Arts Degrees) Bill 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. We write on behalf of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing in Australasia.

The AAWP was established in 1996 to advance teaching and research in writing in Australasia and has, throughout the years, supported staff and students in creative and critical practice, interdisciplinary research, engagement and education. Creative writing staff, students and university programs are all seriously impacted by the job ready legislation that commenced at the beginning of 2021. This legislation has priced arts and humanities education at a level that is unaffordable for everyday Australians, meaning either that students decide not to enter higher education, or exit their degree with a crippling debt. To be specific, domestic students in most HASS degrees pay \$17,399 per annum, while students in allied health, engineering and science pay \$9,537 per annum, and those in nursing, agriculture and mathematics pay only \$4738 per annum (2026 figures). While students in most HASS disciplines are paying significantly more, universities have faced significantly reduced funding to deliver any and all of their programs.

The background to that legislation was inadequately investigated, because it entirely missed the value of arts and humanities training. Not only do arts and humanities degrees train students in what is often termed the 4Cs – creativity, communication, critical thinking and collaboration; they also produce students who rapidly enter the jobs market, not least because graduates also possess capacities in problem-solving, innovation, project management, and in understanding social imperatives, aspirations and values. Recent research conducted for the Deans of Arts, Social Science and Humanities (DASSH) research shows that some 90% of their graduates are in fulltime employment three years after graduation, and earning the median income. These are far better outcomes than those experienced by STEM graduates, so the logic of jobs-ready training has not been provided by this legislation and policy implementation.

The background for that legislation and its implementation as the Jobs Ready Graduates Package also overlooked the important calls by industry and other professional groups for the



sort of capacities delivered by arts and humanities degrees, expressed in a number of contemporaneous reports including:

- the Australian Public Service Commission report, which **identifies creative thinking and collaborative strategies as key to addressing wicked problems** [Australian Public Service Commission 2012 Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective (31 May)];
- both the 2016 Global Innovation Strategy [Commonwealth of Australia 2019 National Innovation & Science Agenda, PMC, Australian Government] and the 2019 National Innovation and Science Agenda [DIIS 2016 Global Innovation Strategy, Department of Industry, Australian Government], **which identify the need to advance Australia through culture and collaboration;**
- the Australian Industry Group, which describes Australia as ‘at the back of the OECD pack in collaboration’ and **calls for creativity and interconnectedness, nationally and internationally, to boost the economy** [Australian Industry Group 2016 Joining Forces: Innovation Success Through Partnerships, Melbourne: AiGroup];
- the Business Council of Australia, which called for a **Humanities mindset** to build prosperity, healthy communities and quality leadership [The True Value of the Humanities].

A corpus of research over the past decade has demonstrated that while creative, arts and humanities degrees are not specifically vocational in their design, (a) these graduates move quickly into employment, (b) capable of delivering significant benefits to their employers because of their capacity to engage creatively with both problems and opportunities and (c) offer valuable contributions to social, economic and wellbeing imperatives.

The increasing trend, in Australia and internationally, for health, STEM and business organisations to collaborate with creative writers and visual and performing artists, shows the value of such training to advance knowledge, enrich community wellbeing, and supporting the economy. Just a few of the many examples include:

- the Consortium for Dark Sky Studies in the USA, which includes poets, artists, technology experts and physicists;
- the Defence ARRTS project in the ACT, which brings together creative artists and mental health experts to address the problem of physical and psychological disorders among Australian returned service personnel;
- the United Artists Project/Micah Project in Queensland, where artists and disability workers collaborate to support improvements in mental and physical health, employability and housing;
- ArtAngel in the UK, which combines business/investment and artists to build projects that improve communities and wellbeing.

Many other projects in Australia and abroad combine creative writers, and visual and performing artists with health professionals to work with our aging population, people with mental illness, people with addiction, and other in-need groups, supporting their recovery and/or wellness, their ability to live worthwhile lives, and reducing the cost to the economy of groups and individuals who would otherwise need significantly more care, and be unable



to contribute to society and the economy. As Australia is moving rapidly to offer social prescribing treatments – which draw heavily on arts and humanities expertise – the value of graduates from these disciplines continues to grow.

Examples from our current professional practice include:

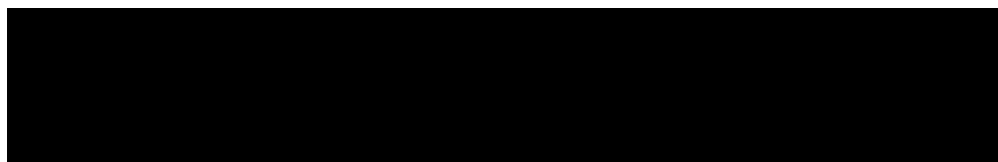
- Storytelling and drawing workshops with clients in drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs;
- A neuroimaging study using creative writing research to investigate the brain's microstates with potential applications in the health sphere, including in autism spectrum disorders as well as anxiety and depression (in epidemic proportions in contemporary Australian youth);
- Storytelling workshops with the frail elderly living in residential care;
- Creative writing workshops with drought-affected farmers and pastoralists in rural NSW, and with bushfire-damaged communities along the NSW South Coast.

What this shows is that graduates of creative arts degrees are, in fact, already job ready, and demonstrably delivering important contributions to Australia's economy, society, innovation, business, community and wellbeing. The substantial impost on the cost of an arts or humanities degree is already causing real harm to that sector; causing significant declines in the numbers of young Australians electing to undertake degrees in these fields; and the knock-on effect will be fewer people capable of delivering what our country needs for health and prosperity—as evidenced by the number of informed calls for repeal that complement our position, as outlined in this letter:

- Innovative Research Universities (IRU) mapping the impacts of JRG on low-SES enrolment, [Impacts-of-the-Job-Ready-Graduates-policy-and-options-for-reform-IRU-analysis.pdf](#)
- 2026 Budget submission, [Future budgets must invest in Australian thinking – Australian Academy of the Humanities](#)
- 2025 pre-election platform – Backing Australian Thinking, [2025-AAH-Election-Position-Statement-Backing-Australian-Thinking-1.pdf](#) (see first call to action: repeal JRG package)
- 2024 Submission on the Universities Accord Bill, [JRG undermining positive reforms to student support](#)

Please support choice and equity in higher education.

Sincerely,



Assoc Professor Julia Prendergast, AAWP Chair (Swinburne University, Melbourne), Dr Lee McGowan, AAWP Deputy Chair (University of Queensland), and Distinguished Professor Emerita Jen Webb, AAWP Treasurer (the University of Canberra, ACT), on behalf of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP).