



**FATIMA PAYMAN**  
**INDEPENDENT SENATOR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA**  
**SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT**  
**(REVERSE JOB-READY GRADUATES FEE HIKES AND END 50K ARTS DEGREES)**  
**BILL 2025**

Committee Secretary

Education and Employment Legislation Committee

Department of the Senate

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I thank the committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

My submission will be brief. The Job-Ready Graduates program, introduced under the Morrison government, has been a colossal failure. As the Australian Universities Accord Review found:

*The JRG package needs to be replaced. Its purpose of providing price signals to influence student subject choices has failed. Only 1.5% of students applied to enrol in courses they would not have applied for under the pre JRG student contribution arrangements. It has left some students facing extremely high student contributions and large HELP debts that do not reflect their future earning potential, and tilted the overall cost burden of higher education further on to students and away from the Australian Government.*

That report is now more than two years old, yet nothing has been done. Once again, it falls upon MPs from outside the major parties to lead the way in addressing the unjust programs of the previous government, inexplicably continued by the current government. A \$50,000 arts degree is symptomatic of the transformation our tertiary education system has been undergoing, from places of learning and

discovery to profit-oriented businesses. In the Senate on 29 July 2025, I lamented the want of vision of the government's 20% HECS debt reduction:

*As with so many government bills that come before this chamber, it is a good start. The government has got good intentions, but we could be doing much, much more. Australians are calling for structural reform, not tokenistic gestures or one-off policies. That means fixing the timing of HECS indexation so students aren't charged interest on money they have already paid. It means scrapping the failed Job-ready Graduates Package that has only driven up debt without delivering outcomes. It means properly funding and expanding paid placements across all critical professions, not just a select few. Above all, it means ending the treatment of students as cash cows and restoring education as the public good it's meant to be. We've had the reviews, we've had the reports. It's time for action, so let's get on with it.*

Unfortunately, this government only sees tertiary education reform through a political lens. Consider the following exchange that occurred during the Senate estimates hearing held on 10 October 2025:

*Senator PAYMAN: Minister, would you care to comment on that—on where the 20 per cent came from? I've had a lot of students and constituents reach out and ask me where. I'm simply trying to get answers for them.*

*Senator Walsh: Well, it's pretty good, isn't it—20 per cent wiped off HECS debt; \$16 billion in debt wiped for three million Australians.*

*Senator PAYMAN: Where did we get the 20 per cent?*

*Senator Walsh: On average debt of \$27,000, \$5,000 in savings will flow through to people's accounts in the next couple of months. It was a pretty good decision that the cabinet made that day, but the basis of the decision is cabinet in confidence.*

*Senator PAYMAN: Was there any particular evidence that the government relied on to support this choice of 20 per cent debt reduction?*

*Senator Walsh: I think the secretary has just given evidence that the usual process is that options are provided and then deliberations are made and cabinet makes decisions, and those decisions are in confidence.*

*Senator PAYMAN: Secretary, are you able to outline what options were given to government?*

*Mr Cook : No. Those options were part of cabinet papers and therefore part of cabinet deliberations.*

It is obvious that this decision was not based on any evidence. I support reducing debts, but a 20% cut is more beneficial to those who have the greatest capacity to take on debt. A more equitable solution, as proposed by the e61 institute, would have been to cut debts by a flat amount of \$5500. Alas, the moment has passed. It is imperative that future decisions are made on a sound policy basis, rather than a sound political basis.

## **Recommendations:**

- 1. That the bill be passed.**

- 2. That the Australian Government amend all higher education support loan programs so that indexation occurs after the repayment for the financial year is made, rather than before.**
- 3. That the Australian Government expand the Commonwealth Prac Payment program to include medical students.**
- 4. That the Australian Government make future decisions on tertiary education reform on a sound policy basis, rather than a sound political basis.**