

Senator Malcolm Roberts
PO Box 228
Brisbane, QLD, 4001

14 August 2020

Dear Senator Roberts

I am writing to you as President of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ), a national membership association and peak advocacy body, representing art historians, writers, curators and artists from around the country. I am writing on behalf of our members to request that you oppose the Commonwealth government's proposed changes to university funding. These changes include increasing fees for Humanities degrees by 113%. This is inherently unfair and short-sighted and will have unintended negative impacts across Australia.

The proposed changes disproportionately disadvantage women who account for two-thirds of students enrolled in Humanities degrees. This is untenable and will contribute to more long-term financial insecurity for women and a further widening of the gender gap. We are also concerned that the rise in fees may put Humanities subjects out of reach for many students from low socio-economic backgrounds, first-in-family students and Indigenous students. At a time when young people are already facing increasing financial insecurity, burdening graduates with increased debt through fee hikes has the potential to create even more social disadvantage which does not support a healthy economy.

The basic premise of the package – that Humanities degrees will be less 'job relevant' in the future – is flawed. Job-ready graduates of the future will need backgrounds in the Humanities, and the arts in particular. Indeed the arts are increasingly recognised as integral to STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and are being integrated into what has become known as STEAM education. STEAM is a global movement that acknowledges that to adequately prepare the workforce of the twenty-first century, societies need to provide education that will produce innovative and agile thinkers. Business leaders from companies including Barclay's Bank, Microsoft and Xeros, to name a few, all comment on the importance of arts education in helping students develop workplace skills. Indeed Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, explained 'technology alone is not enough...it's technology married with the humanities that yields us the results.'¹ Combining arts and science recognises that it is interdisciplinary innovators who will make the discoveries that will solve the problems of the future and this is key to producing successful economies. The current proposal creates unfair divisions between disciplines, and actively discourages students from undertaking Humanities degrees. It would be far more prudent to encourage young Australians to have a cross-disciplinary grounding and ensure Humanities degrees remain financially accessible.

Disincentivising Humanities students on grounds that jobs in the arts are less relevant to the economy also completely ignores the thriving creative industries which, pre-COVID, injected over \$111.7 billion to the national economy annually.² The sector generated \$3.2 billion in exports and employs over 600,000 people with a further 263,563 workers embedded in non-creative industries, proving a clear industry demand for cross-disciplinary skills.³ Between the 2011 and 2016 census creative employment *grew* in Australia at an average rate of 2.2% which was nearly twice the rate of growth within the wider Australian workforce. The Australian Government's own Bureau of Communication and Arts Research recently noted that 'creative skills are likely to be vital for future employment as many of the industries projected for fastest growth over the next five years will rely on workers with creative qualifications.'⁴ The Government's Skills for the Future website lists creativity, originality, initiative, analytical thinking and innovation at the top of a list of competencies identified by companies as the skills that will be in demand in the future. These are the skills the Humanities subjects excel in developing. It therefore makes no sense to 'send a price signal' that discourages students from undertaking Humanities degrees on the false assumption that these degrees are not expected to prepare students for employment growth areas.

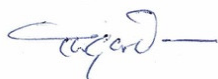
The public gallery sector, where many Art History and Visual Arts graduates find employment, currently makes substantial contributions to cultural tourism. Last year public galleries in Australia were visited by more than 16.5 million people with 44% of all visitors attending regional galleries.⁵ This is vital to the economic prosperity of cities and many regional Australian towns. For instance one exhibition alone held at a regional gallery in Victoria attracted over 140,000 visitors over a four month period and injected \$13.2 million into the local economy.⁶ Galleries and museums make substantial contributions to the economic revitalisation of cities and regional hubs. This has been witnessed in the prosperity of Hobart following the opening of the Museum of Old and New Art, with flow on benefits to local traders and sparking a buoyant property market.

Furthermore, it is well recognised that the arts play a vital role in building resilient communities with direct links to health and wellbeing.⁷ Many galleries around Australia have been at the forefront helping their communities heal from major disasters and, in this time of enforced social isolation from COVID-19, it is the arts that people are turning to for solace and connectedness. Most galleries have active lifelong learning and public programs that are culturally inclusive and target visitors from all sections of society. Exhibitions, education and public programs are developed and implemented by people with degrees in the Humanities. Indeed human capital is core to the achievements of these institutions and the current success of public galleries and museums across Australia is directly related to the tertiary education of directors, curators, artists and other gallery professionals. This education was affordable and proportionate and enabled students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds to participate thereby ensuring a wide pool of talented and capable professionals who have subsequently built the prosperity of the sector.

We are not only concerned about the detrimental impact this bill will have on Humanities students, but on the university sector as a whole, which is already struggling with COVID-19 disruptions and widespread job losses. While the Government says it will be creating 100,000 new university places, it is not providing any extra funding to support this. In fact, the Government is *decreasing* its own funding to students' learning, from 58% to 52%. This includes cutting its own contributions to areas such as Science and Engineering, meaning universities will have *less* money to teach these students, potentially compromising the quality of their education. Increasing fees for Humanities degrees is a mechanism by which the Government is effectively transferring the debt burden to other young Australians. The package has been rightly analysed and criticised as ineffective and confused and described in one newspaper as 'one of the most ill-considered initiatives seen in decades' and as a 'massive fiscal fail' in *The Australian* newspaper.⁸

For the above reasons, I urge you to reject the proposed changes when the legislation comes before the Senate. Doing so will ensure that Humanities education remains accessible and equitable and does not unfairly discriminate against some cohorts of students. Abolishing the proposed fee hike for Humanities degrees will ensure the creative industries and cultural sector can continue to grow into the future and make significant contributions to the economy, health and wellbeing of Australian citizens and the liveability of our cities and towns in a post-COVID recovery.

Yours sincerely



Dr Wendy Garden
PRESIDENT, ART ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

¹ Steve Jobs quoted in Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*. Abacus: London, 2015, p. 485.

² Australian Government, Department of Communications and the Arts, Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (BCAR), "Cultural and creative activity in Australia 2008-09 to 2016-17." Working Paper, 2018, p. 1.

³ Ibid., p. 14. Refer also Creative Industries Innovation Centre, "Valuing Australia's creative industries" Final Report, 2013.

⁴ A New Approach, "Transformative: impacts of culture and creativity", Report Two, November 2019, p. 31. Refer also BCAR, p. 1.

⁵ Museums & Galleries Queensland and Public Gallery Association of Victoria, "Australian public galleries snapshot", 2020, p. 5.

⁶ Mark Kearney, "Marilyn Monroe exhibition a \$13 million economic windfall for Bendigo." *Bendigo Courier*, 20 October 2016.

⁷ VicHealth, "Audience access standards", 2006, p. 4.

⁸ Nicholas Stuart, "One of the most ill-considered, anti-intellectual 'initiatives' seen for decades", *The Canberra Times*, 24 June 2020. Peter van Onselen, "A masterclass in bad public policy", *The Australian*, 20 June 2020.