

DASSH Response to the Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill (2017)

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the potential reforms to higher education outlined in the *Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill (2017)* and appreciates the Education and Employment Legislation Committee's commitment to working closely with all stakeholders.

DASSH represents humanities, arts and social science (HASS) disciplines across 37 Australian universities. There are elements of the proposed reforms that we welcome, including legislative protection for the student equity program *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)*, and expansion of the demand driven system to diploma, advanced diploma and associate degrees at public universities. We urge the government to ensure that its proposed framework for sub-bachelor programs does not prevent funding of those diplomas, such as languages, that often run concurrently with Bachelor programs.

Much of the proposed package does not appear to be in the best interests of Australian students, or Australia as a whole. Along with many of our colleagues in the higher education sector, DASSH members regard the proposals to cut government funding of university education and to raise fees and impose further debt on students as detrimental to the government's commitment to Australia's future growth and prosperity. We are especially concerned that the increased costs associated with a higher education will function as a barrier to accessing university education for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As outlined in our [2014 submission](#) to your committee on the *Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014*, the proposed changes to the HECS-HELP loan repayment threshold will result in disproportionately higher student HELP debt for HASS students. There is some evidence that five years after graduation HASS graduates earn incomes that are equivalent to or above STEM graduates (QILT, *2016 Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal (GOS-L)*). However, they often have periods of unemployment or employment in positions with low pay for a longer period following graduation than their STEM peers (Graduate destinations data). Further because more HASS students are women (64% compared with 57% of all students, 2015 Department of Education uCube data), they are more likely to have career interruptions in the period when they have lower incomes, leading to a higher average debt burden for HASS graduates than their STEM peers.

DASSH is concerned about the proposed efficiency dividend imposed on universities in 2018 and 2019 and its long-term impacts. We also note the lack of clarity around a number of significant measures proposed in the Bill, and the impact this has on the ability of universities to plan accordingly. These measures include, but are not limited to, the implementation of the 7.5 per cent Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding linked to performance metrics and how this will be measured, and the realisation and delivery of postgraduate coursework scholarships.

Professor Susan Dodds

President

Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)

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About DASSH

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is the authoritative agency on research, teaching and learning for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) in Australian and New Zealand universities.

DASSH supports those within these institutions who have responsibility for the governance and management of research and teaching and learning in their universities. DASSH also supports those who aspire to these positions through a Network of Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) and a Network of Associate Deans (Research).