

Australia's economic recovery, future students to pay the price as Job-ready Graduates legislation passes senate

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) was deeply disappointed to see the senate pass the government's Job-ready Graduates legislation this morning.

The impact of this legislation will be to discourage future students from undertaking courses in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) disciplines and to raise student contributions for most of these courses by 113 per cent, passing debt burdens to graduates.

The HASS disciplines are critical to Australia's economic recovery, with a series of reports – including the government's own data - finding that graduates from university HASS degrees are among the most sought after by employers for their highly refined critical thinking and communication skills, as well as their independence of thought and cultural competencies.

"I dread the thought that we live in a society that actively seeks to discourage enrolments in HASS degrees," said DASSH President, Prof Cathy Coleborne.

"More than ever, we need to be preparing students for employment in an unpredictable world. Those who complete HASS degrees will be equipped with the skills they'll need for the future, such as how to collect, interpret and analyse new information, develop reasoned responses, and communicate their findings to broad audiences. I can't imagine anything more important in our efforts to get our economy thriving again."

The fact that the package is titled, "Job-ready Graduates," implying that most HASS graduates are not 'job-ready', is an insult to all of the workers across Australia whose HASS qualifications secured their employment, including many of the politicians responsible for passing this legislation. A government-funded report¹ found that the employment prospects of HASS graduates are virtually indistinguishable from those of their counterparts with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) degrees.

"There is no logical reason to lump HASS students with excessive fees if the intention is to dissuade them from courses that the government doesn't consider 'job-ready.' This policy only makes sense as a negative statement from the government about the value of HASS degrees and their outcomes," said Prof Coleborne.

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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 Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) in Australian and New Zealand universities. DASSH supports those within these institutions who have responsibility for the governance and management of research, teaching and engagement in HASS disciplines. DASSH also supports those who aspire to these positions through a Network of Associate and Deputy Deans.

¹ Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching: Graduate Employment, 2020 GOS-L National Report.
<https://www.qilt.edu.au/qilt-surveys/graduate-employment>