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**SUBMISSION ON THE DRAFT LEGISLATION TO IMPLEMENT THE  
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S JOB-READY GRADUATES PACKAGE**

**7 September 2020**

**TO: The Education and Employment Legislation Committee**

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the EELC Inquiry to inform the Government's approach to changed legislative arrangements for the higher education system.

Other experts and stakeholders have advised that the proposed changes will probably not have the intended policy outcomes and, indeed, lead to unfortunate and damaging consequences for both individuals and the country. This submission focuses on the value of education in the humanities for Australia. Both the future workforce of the museum and gallery sector and the subsequent quality and range of services and programs which these institutions provide to the Australian community, are at stake.

Before making specific comments, we will outline who we are and what we do.

**Who we are**

AMaGA is the national membership association and peak advocacy body representing museums and galleries. We encompass a wide and diverse range of national, state, regional and community museums, art galleries, historic sites, botanic and zoological gardens, research centres, Indigenous cultural centres, and Keeping Places across Australia. Our 1400 members represent thousands of individual professionals through the large institutions and thousands more individual volunteers.

AMaGA is an advocacy, research, service and professional development organisation. We build on a history of museum professional association activity that extends back to the 1930s, have branches in every state and territory, and support professional national networks of expertise. AMaGA works closely with our partner, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Australia Committee, which provides an international voice for museum professionals, and from which we also draw research and advice. More information on AMaGA and our members can be found at <https://www.amaga.org.au/annual-reports-0>

**Public value**

Galleries and museums are central to wellbeing, identity, and maintaining social cohesion. They inspire a high level of trust and confidence, and connect Australians with the stories, art, heritage and histories of their community at a local, regional and national level. They are also critical contributors to national and regional economies. They help foster the creative industries which are one of the engine houses of the economy and are key drivers of successful cultural tourism and regional development. For example, more domestic tourists attend the arts than organised sport, amusement parks or wineries. See <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/domestic-arts-tourism-connecting-the-country/>

Museums and galleries are integral parts of Australia's arts and cultural ecosystem which is a **\$111.7bn industry that contributes 6.5% of GDP**.

**Comments on the draft legislation**

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association joins with other peak bodies in deploring the Government's proposed changes to university fee structures that would disproportionately impact humanities degree.

Although the organisation welcomes the announcement of 39,000 additional university places for Australian students, these should not be funded at the expense of other disciplines and especially not

those that seed the arts and creative sectors that are core contributors to both the economy and a richer cultural life.

The proposed changes will unfairly impact the humanities, which are the source degrees for the arts and creative sector. Australia has over 2,500 museums and galleries across the country. This includes the 22 state and national institutions; 250 or so public galleries and museums operated by local governments, both regional and metropolitan; and 2,000 volunteer-run, community organisations acting as community anchors and custodians of Australia's distributed national collection spread across regional and rural Australia.

Museums in Australia cover a range of important topics including social, political and environmental history; geography; aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage; art history and contemporary art; and more. They include historic houses, historic keeping places, and historic landscapes.

Many of the areas that museums take as their focus are embedded within the humanities, arts and social sciences – degrees that will be deeply impacted by the proposed fees structure changes. This has potential flow on effects for museum workforces and the necessary skills and attributes that museums professionals gain from humanities degrees including critical thinking, creativity and innovation. For aspiring museum and art gallery workers, a future debt of \$45,000 may be too heavy a burden to carry and could discourage them from pursuing a career in the sector. Long-term this has the danger of further reducing representation in the sector which will damage the critical conversations many institutions are driving and that Australia needs to have.

While we acknowledge that humanities degrees are not the only qualifications museum and gallery professionals acquire – and in fact many of our museums take science and technology as their focus – we strongly advocate for the importance of humanities degrees in the museum and gallery sector in Australia and we are disappointed that the Government believes humanities – and subsequently the museums and galleries sector – are of less importance than other industries.

*“As an Arts graduate working in a science museum I bring the skills I learned over the course of my humanities degree to bear on my work every day. I believe many professionals overlook skills like social sciences research, critical thinking and writing, considering them unimportant outside of academia, but my career in museums and galleries would not be possible without them.”*

Natalie, Emerging Museum Professional

## Recommendations

AMaGA recommends that the legislation not be passed in its current form and that full and appropriate consultation occur with the higher education sector and relevant bodies on any changes to current funding arrangements.

**Specifically, we seek the development and release of a comprehensive Regulation Impact Statement, detailing options for achieving the Government's intended goals.**

## Conclusion

We welcome fair and reasoned policy that leads to the improvement of opportunities for all higher education seekers. However, we believe that the proposed legislative changes do not provide these opportunities for humanities students and are likely to inflict long-term damage on Australia's cultural life, health and wellbeing, and economies at every level.

We endorse the submissions prepared by the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS), and the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) and urge the federal Government to engage with the sector and other advocates in redesigning the legislation.

## References and Further Reading

A New Approach, *Transformative: Impacts of Culture and Creativity* Insight Report Two (2019)  
<https://www.humanities.org.au/new-approach/report2/>

AMaGA Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health (2019)  
<https://www.amaga.org.au/news/amaga-submission-pc-inquiry-mental-health>

Bureau of Communications and Arts Research, *Creative Skills for the Future Economy* (Australian Government 2019) <https://www.communications.gov.au/publications/creative-skills-future-economy>

Henley, D, *The Arts Dividend Revisited: Why investment in culture pays*, 2020

Museum facts and data: American Alliance of Museums: <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/museum-facts-data/>

*Telling Australia's story - and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions* (2019). <https://apo.org.au/node/228746>

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