



Australian
Historical
Association

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To the Education and Employment Legislation Committee,

The Australian Historical Association (AHA) is the peak national body of historians and students which includes academic, professional, and other historians working in all fields of history. We represent nearly 1,000 members researching and teaching in and on Australia. The AHA presents this submission to the current Inquiry to register its strong support of the **Higher Education Support Amendment (Reverse Job-Ready Graduates Fee Hikes and End 50k Arts Degrees) Bill 2025**.

The AHA has registered its opposition to the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) policy since its inception and introduction under the Morrison federal government (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), and continues to express its dismay that this exclusive and punitive funding scheme has not yet been abolished. In 2025 the AHA launched a campaign to repeal JRG, which included publishing an [open letter](#) signed by 100 prominent Australians holding Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees. Comments left on an accompanying [petition](#), signed by thousands, revealed the vast applicability of the BA outside of the university. One commenter said:

I am the grateful recipient of an Arts degree, now run a very successful \$3m a year business and want to see others have a fair opportunity to access the understanding, skills and knowledge that a good Arts degree can give. Penalising those who choose Arts degrees ignored the patterns of graduate employment, which show Arts graduates to have transferrable skills of analysis and imagination. Arts degrees should be rigorous and should build on the established disciplines, but generalist liberal education is good for business and for civic life and personal development.

Another commented:

I have a BA (Hons) from Melbourne University and have had a 25 year highly successful career in a range of sectors. I attribute this to the vital skills I learned during my Arts Degree, which taught me how to think, reason and critically assess. I am passionate about humanities and believe the world needs these skills more than ever.

Another commented:

Museum professional. I come from a lower socio-economic background. Even now my colleagues generally come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. How can we hear voices from everyone if people from all walks can't afford to be in the industry?

This last comment particularly highlights the exclusionary implications of JRG. The arts, humanities, and social sciences have traditionally been popular choices for Indigenous, regional, and female students. That the price of student contributions for Commonwealth supported places in such courses as these have risen 113 per cent presents a major obstacle to university study for these students. This will have significant implications for the ways in which Australian history, culture, heritage, and values are understood, enacted, taught, and studied in the future. For example, the Australian public

have benefited from the vast knowledge and ongoing contributions to public life of Professor Frank Bongiorno and Professor Marcia Langton, two historians and commentators who come from working-class and First Nations backgrounds respectively. The financial barriers that JRG imposes risks equivalent opportunities for future Australians of similar circumstances, diminishing the diversity of experience and perspective that enriches our understanding of Australian life. In the context of a climate where misinformation is increasingly an issue of national security and social cohesion, knowledge of history can counter the forces that promote misinformation and social division. As our nation faces uncertain geopolitical trends, we must ask ourselves: if younger Australians do not undertake the study of our region, our contexts, our antiquity, our values, who will?

The AHA's ongoing efforts to repeal JRG have unfolded alongside recognition that the notion of BA graduates not being "job-ready" is plainly false. When the Morrison government first introduced JRG in 2021, the Labor caucus criticised it as being "inequitable", "pernicious", and "perverse". Labor Senators noted in debates over the JRG bill that the arts, humanities, and social sciences "offer students robust generalist educations, with strong employment prospects upon completion ... [T]he evidence is that, three years after completion, [arts] graduates are employed at the same rate as science or maths graduates." Education Minister Jason Clare remarked recently that it was 'clear' that JRG had failed. Yet he has consistently deferred any plans to unwind the policy.

What's more, there has been increasing acknowledgement that JRG is a policy failure that narrows, rather than widens, the path of opportunity for prospective students. The [Australian Universities Accord Review](#), for instance, found in 2024 that JRG "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." The [Australia Institute](#) in 2024 found that JRG left degrees focusing on society and culture costing almost \$50,000 over three years.

More recently, [Innovative Research Universities](#) (IRU) revealed the impact that JRG has had on tertiary education in Australia. Students contributed \$368 million more in 2024 than what they would have under pre-JRG rates, while government contributions were \$1.18 billion lower. Low SES student Bachelor commencements decreased 9.8 per cent (compared with 2.2 per cent for non-low SES students); low SES commencements declined 19.7 per cent in courses with the highest student contribution rates (including the humanities). Clearly, as JRG has shifted the cost of university funding from the government to students themselves, low SES students are disproportionately feeling the effects of this funding policy. Consequently, many of them will choose not to study at all. Others will be burdened with a HECS debt that will delay or derail their progression through life, impacting on their ability to purchase a home, or to have children. This policy imposes lifelong consequences on young people.

The AHA thanks the Education and Employment Legislation Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. We would also like to acknowledge the work of The Greens, Dai Le MP, and Senator David Pocock for helping to keep this issue on the national agenda.

Kind regards,



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