



October 2020

Dear -----

EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT

We are writing this letter in response to the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020 in which course fees for humanities students double, and struggling first year students who fail more than half their first year units lose their Commonwealth supported place and access to HECS-HELP loans.

We are the Monash Youth Committee (MYC), an inclusive group of young people who represent the needs and views of local young people in the City of Monash. Our Committee is made up of high school and university students, and as such, this Bill is an issue which deeply concerns us. The reasons why we oppose this bill are outlined below.

Firstly, The COVID-19 pandemic has been a particularly hard time for all Australians and the group of people impacted hardest has been young people. Young people who are completing secondary schooling in 2020 are facing greater challenges and uncertainty than ever before and should be supported through this process rather than face increased university fees and the risk of losing HECS-HELP loans if they struggle with the transition from secondary school to first year university. The Higher Education Bill will only make it harder for young people, in particular, a disproportionate impact on marginalised and low income students. In a media release titled 'Uni Bill Deserves To Fail' on 30 September 2020, Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie stated this Bill "*focusing on first- year failures just bakes in disadvantage...*".

Secondly, this Bill does not address the core issue that has been identified. In the Sydney Morning Herald's article published on 12th August 2020, the Education Minister Dan Tehan MP is quoted as saying that "the lack of transparency of a student's enrolment has allowed some non-genuine students to enrol and re-enrol at multiple providers at the same time." We understand that this can be a great financial burden on government resources, and is not appropriate for students to be doing. However, it seems that the underlying issue will not be resolved by punishing students who are struggling to understand the tertiary education enrolment system. Rather, there should be changes to this system that improve transparency of enrolment and communication between providers. This would prevent the problem at its root cause, rather than adding another layer of legislation that works to further confuse and place stress upon young people who are already experiencing a challenging transition in their life. Additionally, there are already measures put in place by universities to prevent students from enrolling in the same unit over and over again. So if students are failing frequently, the existing regulatory measures in place at the university will identify the issue and address this directly with the student to ensure that they are not 'wasting' their own or others' money.

Thirdly, increasing the price of humanities degrees will not motivate students to change courses. Teenagers going into university are not driven by the size of their HECS debt, but rather by genuine career interest. However, if you were to treat a university degree like any other purchasable commodity, forcing students to choose a degree due to cost, will impact how students perform at university and subsequently at their jobs. Motivation to change courses arises from the student's inherent desire to pursue different avenues of study. By shifting the financial burden on the individual, it would cast aside their liberties to an education that they desire and trivializes their expertise in a career, and thus reducing productivity in that job sector. This Bill is pushing for students to grab onto “job-relevant” courses and grossly overlooks research that shows that students who pick degrees that are of no interest to them cause them to perform worse academically, than those who are motivated by an interest in their course. Naturally, certain fields of study attract certain students with the capability to be able to succeed in their respective sector, so why would it be necessary to impose larger fees on certain courses with the inevitable possibility that some may not be suited for it?

The new amendments further disadvantage young adults, through forcing students into careers, industries and sectors that have statistically been proven to have lower employment rates. According to Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the current system of increasing university fees can result in the fees of humanities courses reaching as high as that of medicine. This emphasises how integral it is to create a more equitable system of fees, where individuals aren't disadvantaged by being led down pathways where there is a lower likelihood of employment, working counterintuitively against the government's initial plan of streamlining students into areas of supposed employment growth. In fact, results from the 2019 Graduate Outcomes Survey found the total employment rate for graduates of humanities, culture, and social sciences courses in 2019 was 83.9%, whilst sitting at 82.4% for science and mathematics courses. This will result in a disproportionate increase in the competition and demand for jobs in one sector, fuelling further concerns surrounding unemployment and underemployment in younger demographics.

As a united collective of many young people whose education is at stake, we strongly urge you to reconsider your stance on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020 and express our disappointment in this current bill. We, as young people, are concerned with the devastating outcomes it will have on graduates and prospective students, as well as the future implications on the productivity of different business sectors should this bill remain unrectified.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further via a Zoom meeting, you can contact Monash Youth Committee through our current chair Neha Kumar on email, nehasatishkumar@gmail.com Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns.

Kind regards,
Monash Youth Committee