

“Job-Ready Graduates”: Higher Education Reform Package 2020

The Department of Education has proposed reforms focused on the idea of ‘national priority’ courses, through ‘price signals’ to students. This changes where units of study sit in funding clusters which attract differing Commonwealth contributions. At the same time, there are proposed changes to the amounts that students will contribute according to the named disciplines in funding clusters. These changes will be identified at the unit of study (course or class) level, not the degree or program level.

The number of funding clusters has been contracted from 8 to 4. Visual Arts and Crafts, Graphic and Design Studies, and Other Creative Arts have been moved from funding cluster 5 in 2020 to funding cluster 2 in 2021. While this proposed change will see a minor increase in government contribution, it also proposes an increased student contribution. The overall funding universities would receive through the combined streams would therefore increase slightly.

Communication and Media Studies has been moved from funding cluster 5 in 2020 to funding cluster 1 in 2021. The proposal will have a dramatic impact on both government and student contribution: a much higher student contribution and an overall decrease in the total income to universities.

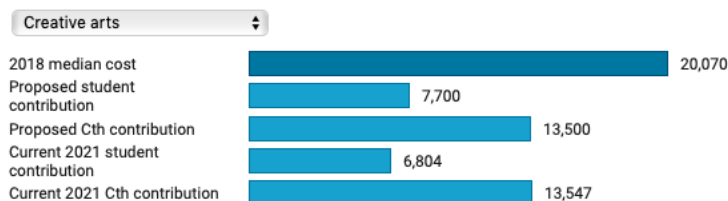
Humanities course funding will certainly be impacted by the proposed changes, with a much higher student contribution (and increase in the overall funding to universities). While the creative arts may not experience such a negative impact, we acknowledge the high value of humanities and arts subjects to our sector and to society. Those proposed changes may have devastating consequences yet to be determined not only for the individual, but for the nation.

Individual universities retain the discretion of how they allocate funded places. The proposal is accompanied by additional, targeted funding for indigenous and regional students.

There is significant criticism from commentators externally and in the university sector of the funding changes, noting the lack of explicable principles that have wide-ranging, and possibly unintended consequences.

Interactive calculator

University course costs and funding



2018 median cost is based on Deloitte estimates

Chart: Michael Janda • Source: ANU/Deloitte [Get the data](#)

Link to the simple, interactive calculator: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-22/university-fee-changes-dan-tehan-capitalist-economics-analysis/12377498>

Key points

- On 19 June 2020, the Department of Education proposed a “Job-ready Graduates: Higher Education Reform Package 2020”, with the majority of changes to commence 1 January 2021 if approved. The Package will ‘affect student contributions and provide additional support for students in regional and remote Australia’.
- No decrease in government contribution for creative arts, with a minor increase of \$192.
- Increase of \$1,016 in student contribution for creative arts.
- Dramatic decrease in humanities funding. This may affect ACUADS members who deliver Communication and Media Studies courses.
- There is confusion surrounding primary disciplines such as Design, which encompass diverse units. For example, in 2020 Digital and Communication design sits within cluster 5, while Industrial Design is in Cluster 7.
- The notion of job-readiness, as proposed by the reforms, demonstrates a limited perspective on the value of tertiary education or the future of work. The value of preparedness for adapting to changing workplaces and a lifetime of long-term work across sectors must be recognised.

Resource links

“Job-ready Graduates” Discussion Paper: <https://www.dese.gov.au/document/job-ready-graduates-discussion-paper>

2021 Allocation of units of study to funding clusters: <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/53407>

2020 Allocation of units of study to funding clusters: <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/52911>

Vin Massaro, “Funding model inadequate on teaching quality and standards” (15 July 2020): <https://campusmorningmail.com.au/news/funding-model-inadequate-on-teaching-quality-and-standards/>

Andrew Norton, “Funding incentives for students and universities in the Tehan reforms: some are aligned, others contradict each other” (12 July 2020): <https://andrewnorton.net.au/2020/07/12/funding-incentives-for-students-and-universities-in-the-tehan-reforms-some-are-aligned-others-contradict-each-other/>