

Media release

GSA President's response to the JOB READY GRADUATE PACKAGE- "Students Deserve Better"

With the Job Ready Graduates Package set to become law after passed by the Senate last week, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of GSA membership to reiterate our firm opposition to its enactment. At its core this legislation remains a poorly designed ideological attack on students that will have major implications for the accessibility of higher education in this country.

A key aim of the package is to incentivise the study of key disciplines like teaching, nursing and engineering. GSA is of the view by making these degrees cheaper for students, it provides less government funding per student for each of these disciplines than the current funding arrangements. In our view, Universities will not be incentivised to offer courses to cover these disciplines – which is contrary to the aim of the package and disadvantages students. We may also see the impact in other ways: fee hikes on other degrees to mitigate the loss of revenue, and failure to recognise that student demand for degrees should be typically driven by the job market and other factors rather than price signalling. Undoubtedly the most callous and harmful element of the package is how it paints humanities, law, creative arts, communications and commerce degrees as less valuable to society or less worthy.

The largest fee hikes are reserved for humanities degrees, which is particularly harmful on two grounds. First, it denies the incredible contributions humanities degrees provide to society, and secondly, it leaves humanities students with considerably large debts. GSA is particularly concerned that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may not chose humanities due to resulting financial disadvantage – which is not acceptable against all principles of accessibility.

We cannot deny serious the impacts that this policy will have on many within our own institution where students are often required to study multiple degrees under the Melbourne Model. The University of Melbourne must swiftly investigate and explain to students the impacts of this policy within the Melbourne Model - how the policy will be implemented but also how the University can mitigate its impacts.

GSA believes in education as a free and accessible right and not as a privilege for those who have the socio-economic means to access it. GSA recognises that the Job Ready Graduates Package will not create more jobs, protect or improve the quality of education, nor will it create a more equal society. We continue to oppose the commercialisation of higher education both with this bill and any such moves into the future.

Jeremy Waite

GSA President

About the Graduate Student Association

The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association (GSA) is the peak representative body for all graduate students at the University of Melbourne. We are an independent association led by an elected student council, providing representation, events, training and support.

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