

Statement on proposed fee increase to humanities degrees in Australian Universities

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association joins with other peak bodies in denouncing 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 of 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.

We welcome fair and reasoned policy that leads to the improvement of opportunities for all higher education seekers and urge the federal Government to engage with the sector and other advocates.

"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

Background

AMaGA is the national body representing museums and galleries, committed to inspiring Australia's cultural life through a thriving and valued museum and gallery sector.

Our 1400 members represent thousands of individual professionals through the large institutions and thousands more individual volunteers.

We advocate for museums and galleries, identify and undertake strategic research, inform policy, set ethical standards and run a broad range of training programs. More information on the organisation and our members can be found at <https://www.amaga.org.au/annual-reports-0>