

Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Education
190 Gray Street
Hamilton, VIC 3300



Institute of
Professional Editors

8 July 2020

BY EMAIL: dan.tehan.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

I write on behalf of the Board of the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd). IPEd is the professional association for Australian and New Zealand editors. It exists to advance the profession of editing and to support and promote Australian and New Zealand editors.

IPEd is concerned about the introduction of the Job-ready Graduates Package of reforms to higher education, which was announced on 19 June. Under these proposals, university fees for students in the areas of the arts, society and culture, law, economics, creative arts and communications will see increases of over 100%.

We understand the need to refocus graduate numbers in certain disciplines in order to support the nation's economic recovery as a result of COVID-19. However, students from humanities disciplines will be unfairly penalised by this set of reforms. It implies that students from those courses do not contribute to Australia's economic success. It also implies that students from those disciplines do not produce job-ready graduates.

Our members work as freelancers or in-house staff for publishing houses, independent authors, not-for-profits, universities, the education sector, the public service and the corporate sector. Editors work in a range of professional areas that all contribute to Australia's economic landscape. IPEd members are academics, communications and IT specialists, Hansard reporters, policy officers and researchers, to name just a few of our job titles other than 'editor'.

Many of our members are also sole traders and small-business owners. Small businesses contribute to local economies by bringing growth and innovation to the community in which the business is established. A federal government report by the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman – *Small Business Counts 2019* – rightly states:

Small businesses account for 35% of Australia's gross domestic profit and employ 44% of Australia's workforce ... A healthy small business sector is a prerequisite for a growing economy with high employment opportunities. In a very real sense, small business counts. What emerges from this report is a picture of a large and vibrant sector, which is vital to the health of the Australian economy.

The report lists a host of industries from construction to the arts and beyond. The arts and recreation services sector alone accounts for 33% of employment in Australia, information media and telecommunications 27.5%, education and training 24.8%. Editors work in all these areas.

A report by PWC prepared for the Australian Copyright Council – *The Economic Contribution of Australia's Copyright Industries: 2002–2016* – states that copyright industries employed over one million people and contributed \$122.8 billion to the Australian economy in 2016.

IPEd supports efforts to boost the higher education sector by prioritising STEM and other labour areas required to support the economy. But why punish those who choose not to enrol in those streams? In these uncertain times the way forward is to enable, rather than disable; to incentivise, not penalise. Raising course fees for arts and humanities programs devalues the contributions those graduates will make to the economy.

Additionally, the increased cost of course fees is not compensated for by the earning potential of graduates in these fields. According to a 2016 IPEd members survey, 72% of editors earn an average of \$50,000 or less. It is not surprising, therefore, that many editors combine editing with other work. Raising the cost of fees would further discourage many of our members to take up higher education, not just in writing, publishing and editing courses, but also in the wider area of humanities.

Editing is a vitally important profession to anyone in print and digital publishing. This is the profession that ensures that your ministry and public servants stay on-message and are able to cut through to the public. Your parliamentary system is vitally supported by the hard-working Hansard editors who dutifully record every argument and speech in both chambers. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in March and April, when the country was in lockdown, Australians turned to the arts for comfort.

IPEd urges you to reconsider the proposed fee increases and to keep all education opportunities accessible. In the current uncertain climate, our nation needs not just the STEM-based industries; it also needs the arts and humanities to inspire and give us hope.

Sincerely

Karen Lee
Chief Executive Officer