

11 September 2020

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment Committees  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: [eec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:eec.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee Secretary,

**Re: Higher Education Support Amendment (Jobs-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020**

The ACTU, formed in 1927, is the peak body for Australian unions and is the only national union confederation in Australia. For more than 90 years, the ACTU has played the leading role in advocating for the rights and conditions of working people and their families. The ACTU is made up of 39 affiliated unions and trades and labour councils, and we represent almost 2 million working people across all industries. As the peak body for working people, who are both the users and providers of tertiary education in this country, we welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry.

The ACTU would like to take this opportunity to commend to the Committee the submission provided by our affiliated union, the National Tertiary Education Union. We share their view that the Bill is not in the public interest and will have profound negative consequences on university staff and students. Further, we believe that this Bill contains a number of deep flaws and contradictions which would not only significantly damage the current system of education funding, but which also render it unsuitable to be enacted. It is the view of the ACTU that this bill should not be passed.

As outlined in more detail in the NTEU submission, this bill suffers from a number of significant flaws and contradictions, including:

- the likely result of the bill being the under-resourcing of commonwealth supported students by public universities already under substantial financial pressures due to the COVID-19 crisis due to this bill compounding the effects of that crisis and delaying the sector's recovery.
- the 'funding' of additional Commonwealth Sponsored Places (CSPs), and other measures, through the reduction existing funding per CSP overall, not by increasing funding to appropriately support these new places

- the unpalatable trade-offs being made due to the ‘need’ for Budget neutrality taking precedence over all other policy or design considerations
- The failure of the COVID-19 response package to properly support universities.
- The increased cost burden on students created by many of the changes.
- That the proposed changes to the ‘balance’ of course costs across disciplines:
  - Is unlikely to achieve its aims
  - May have a chilling effect on students seeking university education,
  - Will disproportionately affect women, regional and indigenous students
  - Results in an average cost increase to students of 10%.
- Contradictions between funding changes and conflicting funding signals created by the changes.

It is our view that these flaws, along with those others also outlined in greater detail in the NTEU submission, mean that this Bill should not be passed by the Senate. We do not believe that these errors, both in conception and construction, are able to be addressed effectively through amendment – this bill must be rejected in its entirety. We encourage the Committee to closely examine the submission provided by the NTEU to this inquiry and are confident that this will result in the members reaching the same conclusion.