



TASA The Australian
Sociological Association

24 June 2020

The Australian Sociological Association's Statement on the Proposed Increased Student Fees for Humanities and Social Science Disciplines

The Federal Government has announced that HASS students, including Sociology students, are to bear the brunt of increased degree fees for Australian undergraduates. Despite evidence that humanities and social science programs are key to Australia's future success, the personal cost of an education in these fields will more than double for many students.

The Government's decision is based on the assumption that sociology and other HASS disciplines are not 'job-relevant'. This is contrary to evidence showing that HASS graduates have comparable employment outcomes to STEM graduates and contradicts the Australian Government's own list of 'Skills for the Future', from a recent World Economic Forum Survey.

Sociology graduates' skills and knowledge in critical thinking and analysis, research and creative problem-solving make them well equipped for the jobs of the future. These skills will be key to navigating the impacts of increasing automation and AI and designing and responding to the social, health, environmental and policy challenges we face.

The purpose of university study goes beyond preparing people for a particular job. It lays the foundations for the future of our society and the careers of the future. Along with other HASS subjects, Sociology provides a foundation for understanding the challenges of living together and developing evidence-based responses to complex global issues.

The proposed changes include some positives. Increased indexation, the commitment to additional student places and supporting access for Indigenous and regional students have our support. However, as sociologists we express deep concern that increasing fees for HASS students will exacerbate intergenerational inequalities for young people, disproportionately impact women and reduce access for students from less privileged backgrounds. More broadly, we worry that reduced overall per-student government funding to universities will diminish the quality of our degree offerings at a time when the sector is already financially vulnerable due to COVID-19.

We urge the government to fundamentally rethink this policy and to hear our message that it is a time where sociology and other HASS disciplines are of increasing, not less, value to Australia's future prosperity.

Dan Woodman

President, The Australian Sociological Association, on behalf of the Executive Committee