

10 September 2020

Committee Secretary

Senate Education and Employment Committees
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretary,

Joint Letter from the Australian Youth Sector

We write to you with concern regarding the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020*.

The proposed changes will significantly increase the cost of youth work courses, limit the number of youth workers and reduce support for tens of thousands of young people in Australia.

Increasing Demand for Youth Workers

Youth workers are qualified professionals who work with young people to facilitate their independence and participation in society. Youth work degrees produce work-ready graduates who have been shown to increase employment opportunities, support education and improve life outcomes for young people.

The COVID-19 pandemic means that youth workers are needed now more than ever. Young people are currently experiencing rising unemployment and underemployment, increases in the prevalence of mental-ill health, and significant disruption to their education, as a direct result of the pandemic. It will take decades for young people to recover from these disruptions, and youth workers are urgently needed to provide support for young people across Australia.

Workforce Shortages

Youth work has been identified as a profession with current and future workforce shortages and this is expected to become worse as the pandemic increases the demand for youth workers over the next decade. The need for more youth workers is recognised by the Federal Government and the profession is listed by the Department of Home Affairs on the Short-Term Skilled Occupation List.

However, the proposed changes will significantly reduce funding for youth work degrees. This is counterproductive to the Federal Government's stated aim of providing subsidies for university courses that meet needs within the economy and where there are shortages of qualified workers. This will also limit the capacity of institutions to produce graduates with the right skills, at the right time, as aspired to in the *Job-Ready Graduates Package*. The reduction in funding will mean that institutions will struggle to offer youth work degrees and this will dramatically increase existing

workforce shortages. Tens of thousands of young people will be unable to access support from a youth worker as a direct result of this change.

Recommendation

We urge the Government to consider this proposal, and recommend that youth work should be treated similarly to social work and moved to the item two funding cluster in the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020. This will ensure that universities are able to continue to offer youth work degrees and produce graduates in the required numbers to fill the current and anticipated employment vacancies, now and in the future.

We would welcome a discussion on this urgent matter and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



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