Why We Need Humanities Graduates in the Workforce

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By Joy Damoussi

Australia's workforce, economy and society need the capabilities of a humanities education: critical thinking, analytical and research skills, and the ability to grapple with and communicate complex ideas.

Education's distinct purpose is to be forward-thinking, but the government's sweeping changes to university fee structures are short-sighted.

Under the changes, students studying humanities, arts and social science (HASS) subjects will face huge fee increases to help fund decreases in costs for students enrolled in other subjects deemed a higher priority for the COVID-19 recovery.

The government has indicated that its "carrot and stick" approach is designed to entice students into jobs for priority industries.

Some humanities subjects do well in the new funding structure, such as languages and English, but the rationale behind history and philosophy receiving negligible Commonwealth funding is unfathomable. Students undertaking a raft of culture and society subjects will now bear 93 per cent of the cost of their degree, up from 52 per cent.

The signal sent by the government in making students bear the full cost of these subjects is that there is no benefit to our community, economy or society in studying Australia's history or that of our foes or allies; that understanding the political systems and cultures of India and China is a benefit accrued only to the individual student and not to their employers or society at large; that a student trained in ethical decision-making, as philosophy challenges them to do, has no job-relevant skills.

Australia's workforce, economy and society will need both specific attributes and broad capabilities of a humanities education: critical thinking, analytical and research skills, and the ability to grapple with and communicate complex ideas.

The government's suggestion that these skills are of no use to employers, or have no public benefit, is at odds with key industry leaders. Business Council of Australia chief executive Jennifer Westacott has noted the importance of humanities in the need for a mixture of skills in the current and future workforce. Concerns raised by peak employer groups this week reflect the desirability of these skills across diverse industries now and for the future workforce.

Research undertaken by the Australian Academy of the Humanities indicates that the Australian public values humanities skills and capabilities. In a series of focus group discussions conducted shortly before COVID-19 took hold, a group of middle-income swing voters from suburban and country Australia strongly asserted they wanted people from both HASS and science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the workplace. Humanities-trained employees bring "balance and human perspectives" to decision-making: "There are going to be more and more human-related challenges, so we will need human skills to overcome this".

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Q1 . Why does the journalist contest the Australian government's decision concerning the study of humanities? Answer the question using your own words. (80 words ± 10%)

Proposition de corrigé:

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The journalist disapproves of the Australian government's decision to disincentivize supposedly useless humanities studies. First, it will saddle humanities students with higher tuition fees. Secondly, it shows a narrow-minded conception of what a society at large and businesses/companies in particular need. Indeed, the humanities offer transferable skills like critical thinking and ethical decision-making that are key to facing the challenges of today's and tomorrow's workplace. This opinion is vindicated by both industry leaders and the general public for which a balance between STEM- and humanities-educated employees is crucial. (88 words)

A. The gvt wants to discourage humanities studies. The journalist disagrees because:
B. Will saddle humanities students with higher tuition fees
C. **short-term** vision for both
    1. society and businesses

D. set of "broad capabilities" that are transferable skills
    1. such as critical thinking and communication skills/ethical decision-making
E. that are good for a business
    1. help face the challenges of today's and tomorrow's workplace
    2. And make the workforce more balanced (education-wise)

F. The journalist's position seems to be vindicated by
    1. Both industry leaders
    2. and public opinion