



Australasian Association of Philosophy

aap.org.au

Dan Tehan
Minister for Education
190 Gray Street,
Hamilton, 3300
6 July 2020

Dear Minister,

The Australasian Association for Philosophy is the peak charity for the promotion of philosophical research, education and scholarship in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. The AAP's membership consists of academic philosophers, including students, as well as community members with an interest in philosophy. The AAP was founded in 1922 and seeks to promote philosophy in universities, schools, and among the general public. The association urges the Government to abandon the Job-ready Graduate package.

The measures it contains do not reflect the reasons why employers in current labour markets value Humanities graduates in general and Philosophy graduates in particular. It also fails to take account of the projected fit between graduates' skills and future labour markets. So even by the narrow economic goals that it sets itself, the package fails. But in addition, it ignores the evidence that education in the Humanities enhances civil society through increased political engagement and volunteering. Finally, the package will entrench women's disadvantage in an economy in which they still face a daunting gender pay-gap.

A recent report by Deloitte Access Economics for Macquarie University demonstrates that both the technical and transferrable skills that Humanities graduates possess are much sought after by employers.¹ The skills deficit that is most striking in this report is between employers' expectations around *communication* skills and the actual performance of graduates. Post-tertiary testing of Bachelor's graduates overseas reveals that Philosophy majors out-perform *all other graduates* in analytical writing skills and in verbal skills.² Their performance on assessments of quantitative skills reveals them to be much closer to graduates in Science and Mathematics than to graduates in other humanities

¹ Deloitte Access Economics, *The Value of the Humanities*, July 2018. Commissioned by Macquarie University.

² The evidence for this comes from the performance of Philosophy graduates on the Graduate Record Exam in the USA. Across all three categories of assessment (verbal comprehension, quantitative analysis, and written communication) Philosophy graduates are .71 standard deviations above the mean for all test takers. The only group of graduates who come close to this exceptional performance are those in Physics and Astronomy at .65 SD above the mean.

disciplines. In short, there is ample evidence that current labour markets value the skills of Humanities graduates in general and Philosophy graduates in particular. If your policy is predicated on advice to the contrary, then we would welcome the opportunity to test that advice against the ample body of evidence that is available.

The policy announcement for the Job-ready Graduates package aims at matching graduate skills with *emerging* labour markets. Here too, we are puzzled by the implications that the technical and transferrable skills associated with the Humanities will be less in demand in the future. By the Government's own projections, fields such as Education and Training, Public Administration and Safety, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, Health Care and Social Assistance and Arts and Recreation Services will all see substantial growth in the coming years. These are the very fields that are top five destinations for Humanities graduates. The skills and knowledge they derive from their studies equip them well for these fields. The Council of Learned Academies recently produced a joint report on the development and implementation of artificially intelligent devices and systems into our economy.³ The representatives of the Academies of Science and of Technology & Engineering insisted that Humanities education is essential to the AI future. Key finding number five insists that the education for this future is not merely STEM, but STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics:

Successful development and implementation of AI will require a broad range of new skills and enhanced capabilities that span the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

The Australasian Association for Philosophy well understands why the federal government would want to reproduce the educational and entrepreneurial environment that makes the United States a leader in high tech and intellectual property. A similar economy here would overcome the tyranny of geographic distance that puts our nation at a disadvantage in terms of traditional manufacturing. But the plain fact is that Silicon Valley *loves* Philosophy graduates because of the creative and unconstrained, yet logical and rigorous, thinking they bring to problem solving. CEO Stewart Butterfield (Slack Technologies, market valuation US\$2.8 billion) puts the value of Philosophy to tech in the following terms:

Studying philosophy taught me two things. I learned how to write really clearly. I learned how to follow an argument all the way down, which is invaluable in running meetings. And when I studied the history of science, I learned about the ways that everyone believes something is true--like the old notion of some kind of ether in the air propagating gravitational forces--until they realized that it wasn't true.⁴

In short, the AAP thinks that the justification offered for doubling the cost of studying Philosophy rests on misapprehensions about the nature and market value of the skills that studying Philosophy imparts.

In light of these facts, we think that the Job-ready Graduate package sends all the wrong price signals. For instance, while it encourages Philosophy majors to undertake some subjects in maths or languages in order to lower the cost of their education, it discourages Science students or Health students from undertaking Philosophy subjects

³ The Effective and Ethical Development of Artificial Intelligence: an opportunity to improve well-being. (July 2019) <https://acola.org/hs4-artificial-intelligence-australia/>

⁴ From an interview with Forbes magazine in 2015 – the same year he was named the Wall Street Journal's Technology Innovator of the year.

in ethics or in political philosophy. This is a perverse outcome and surely contrary to the Government's goals.

The rationale behind the Job-ready Graduate package is clearly about employment and the economy of the future. While these things are important, they are not the *only* things that are important. Australia is a society – not merely an economy. The same Deloitte report that demonstrates the value of Humanities graduates to current labour markets also shows that the capacities that Humanities education communicates underpin civic engagement. For instance, Humanities graduates demonstrate higher than average levels of political engagement and volunteering. Surely these are good things and traits that the Government wishes to encourage in Australia's young people.

Finally, the AAP notes that women are disproportionately represented among Humanities students. The Covid crisis has been more economically damaging to women's employment than to men's. To increase the cost of education for students in the Humanities is to impose further burdens upon a population who are already disadvantaged by the prevailing gender earnings gap. We do not suppose that the Government wishes to be seen to contribute to the sexism that still prevails in too many parts of our economy and our culture.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Levy', written in a cursive style.

Professor Neil Levy, FAHA
President, Australasian Association of Philosophy