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**Restoring Fairness to Funding of Students**

*We are making this submission because we believe that students completing the same accredited sequence in Psychology should pay the same for the subjects in that sequence, irrespective of the course within which the sequence is embedded.  More broadly, we believe that students completing any subject should pay the same as any other student completing that same subject.  This is both fair and equitable*.

These values were put aside when *Jobs Ready Graduates* was introduced.

Prior to *Jobs Ready Graduates*, there was a direct nexus between the subjects that a student studied and their contribution to their education based upon the Band the subjects fell into. Thus, a student who was majoring in the Humanities could take a subject in Mathematics and they would pay a contribution determined by the Band that the Mathematics subject was allocated to. The student in Humanities might be sat next to a student majoring in Physics for whom the Mathematics subject was part of their core. No matter, both the Humanities student and the Physics student would pay the same and the Government contribution would be the same. Funding was tied to the subject, not the degree. After all, their experience of the subject in Mathematics was determined by that subject, not by the degree in which each student was enrolled.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The nexus between the subject and funding was broken by *Jobs Ready Graduates* and its attempt to deal with the ‘problem’ of Psychology and Social Work. Initially, Psychology and Social Work were allocated to Behavioural Science. However, the funding for Behavioural Science had been changed. As illustrated in Figure 1, Left Bar, prior to *Jobs Ready Graduates* a student completing a subject in Behavioural Science would make a Student Contribution of $820.75 which, together with a Government Contribution of $1,328.75, equalled $2,149.5. *Jobs Ready Graduates* changed this to a Student Contribution of $1,812.5 and a Government Contribution of $137.5 for a total of $1,950, as shown in the Middle Bar of Figure 1. Thus, in the middle of a pandemic, which was likely to see demand for mental health services rise, disciplines such as Psychology and Social Work became extremely expensive for students and the Government contributed next to nothing.

Luckily, we were not the only group to see this. The Australian Psychological Society argued that funding for Psychology should be in the same Band as Science and made the point, as noted above, that the burden of training would shift to the student. The Council of Regional Universities noted the likely impact on student choice of the shifts and the subsequent damage to their local institutions and to mental health services in regional areas (see the ([Regional universities roundtable](https://ministers.dese.gov.au/regional-universities-roundtable-chancellors-and-vice-chancellors)).

**Figure 1:**  The changes in the funding of subjects in Psychology as a result of *Jobs Ready Graduates (JRG)*.

Progress was made in addressing the impact of these changes in funding. However, the Government and its advisers decided that they would not fund all students completing a major in Psychology, so on the advice of their Expert Committee, 3 former Vice-Chancellors, they sought to distinguish between a “Professional Psychology Pathway” and other training in Psychology[[2]](#footnote-2). Funding for each subject in the “Professional Psychology Pathway” would be at the level of Allied Health, namely a Student Contribution of $962.5 and a Government Contribution of $1,687.5 for a total of $2,650. This is shown in the Right Bar of Figure 1.

You might reasonably expect that the distinction between “Professional Psychology Pathway” and other training in Psychology would be based upon whether the sequence was accredited by the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC) under the auspices of Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Sadly, you would be wrong: it was based upon whether a student could only graduate in Psychology (i.e., was completing a ‘named’ degree) or possibly switch to graduate in another program.

For example, a student enrolled in a Bachelor of Psychology program can only graduate with a degree in Psychology, even though the accredited sequence that they cover is only 40% of their degree. Their load is included as “Professional Psychology Pathway”. If all the subjects that they do in a year are Psychology, they will pay $7,700 (8\*$962.5.) In contrast, a student who completes the exact same subjects as part of an accredited sequence located in a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree will pay $14,500 (8\*$1,812.5!) The Psychology subjects that they complete are identical. The only difference is that the student in a Bachelor of Psychology program must graduate in Psychology. The student in a BA or a BSc might change their mind and graduate in Sociology or Physics. In other words, there is a significant price to pay for flexibility, which has nothing to do with whether the sequence in Psychology is accredited or not and which entirely disregards the fact that the Physics student may well decide to continue in Psychology (and can do so because of the accredited sequence they completed).

The changes wrought by *Jobs Ready Graduates* also impacted those students who take subjects in Psychology either as part of their degree or because of personal interest. The subject(s) that they take are not part of the “Professional Psychology Pathway”. As a result, students pay $1,812.5 for the privilege of taking a subject in Psychology. The Government pays $137.5.

Given the impact of the above on degrees such as Nursing and Teaching, you can imagine that Universities have re-badged Psychology subjects as “Psychology for Nurses” and “Psychology for Teachers” to ensure that the students within these degrees are not charged at the rate for Behavioural Science! At the same, many Universities have shifted their Psychology load out of the BA and BSc into degrees such as the Bachelor of Psychology, ensuring that students would pay the Allied Health rate for their degree, not the Behavioural Science rate.

It is unclear why the Government was so adamant in differentiating between the Professional Psychology Pathway and the same accredited sequence, which might be located in other degrees, e.g., the BA or BSc? Training in professional and/or research psychology requires that the student complete an APAC-accredited sequence. It does not matter whether the sequence is part of a Bachelor of Psychology, a Bachelor of Arts, or a Bachelor of Science.

You might think that we have raised this issue because there has been a negative impact on students undertaking programs in Psychology. This is not the case. Indeed, as Figure 2 shows, load in Psychology increased gradually over the years 2017-2020 and then jumped by over 10% in 2021, the first year of *Jobs Ready Graduates*. Clearly, Psychology enrolments overall have not been impacted by the changes. Nor does it appear that there has been shift of student load between institutions, although there was some initial confusion given that institutions were unaware of which of their programs would be classified as “Professional Psychology Pathway.”

**Figure 2:** Total domestic load in Psychology by Year.

Why are we drawing this to your attention? First, because we believe that students completing the same accredited sequence in Psychology should pay the same for the subjects in that sequence. Second, because we believe more broadly that students completing any subject should pay the same as any other student completing that same subject. This is both fair and equitable. Of course, this funding for Psychology should remain at the level of Allied Health.

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1. A Full-Time student is assumed to do 8 subjects each year of their, usually, 3-year degree. Thus, the subject in Mathematics would be 1/8 of each student’s load. Typically, the sums presented are one EFTSL, which as above is 8 subjects. Here we focus upon the subject because that is the level at which the Student Contribution and the Government Contribution are calculated. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The equivalent for Social Work was the Professional Pathway Social Work. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)