MEDIA RELEASE

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**ADVOCACY GROUP WELCOMES SENATE INQUIRY INTO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S DISCRIMINATORY CHANGES TO UNIVERSITY FEES**

*Tens of thousands of humanities students targeted with huge financial burdens*

The Australian Communications Advocacy Group (ACAG) has welcomed the Senate inquiry called to examine the Federal Government’s proposed changes to university tuition fees, which it argues are unfair and discriminatory.

ACAG is an initiative of the Public Relations institute of Australia (PRIA), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and International Association of Public Participation (IAP2 Australasia).

Under its Jobs Ready Graduate Package, the Federal Government has flagged broad reaching, national changes to fees associated with humanities courses, including a 91.9 per cent cut in its contribution to Communications degrees, the biggest decrease to any of the university disciplines.

However, in the face of increasing pressure against the controversial legislation, late last week the government was forced to refer its sweeping university funding bill to a Senate inquiry, which will delay its passage through Parliament, with the inquiry due to report by September 25.

National PRIA President and ACAG chair, Leigh McClusky said the proposed changes fly in the face of an inclusive Australia, effectively using a financial ‘big stick’ to push more students into STEM focussed (Science, technology, Engineering and Maths) courses, instead of a broad range of humanities courses.

“For the estimated tens of thousands of South Aussie students, who would normally choose to pursue a whole range of humanities qualifications, this intended move by the Federal Government is unfair and discriminatory and effectively means only those students with deep pockets will have the financial ability to choose any course they wish to pursue. We believe that is simply unfair and must be challenged.” she said.

Exclusive polling conducted by leading research consultancy Lonergan Research for ACAG found the vast majority of Australians support this campaign against the government’s new tuition schedule.

Nearly three quarters of Australians (75 per cent) of Australians believe it is not fair to penalise students who are not suited to STEM courses, while 70 per cent believe all university courses should receive equal funding from the government.

Women are more likely to recognise that these changes are unfair, with four in five (81 per cent) of women responding that it is not fair to penalise students who are not suited to STEM courses.

“Australians value fairness – particularly so when it comes to educational outcomes – and the Prime Minister needs to recognise that these changes are anything but that,” said McClusky.

“Our research shows that the vast majority of Australians recognise that these changes are discriminatory, penalise students who aren’t suited to STEM subjects and undervalue the critical thinking skills acquired through an arts education.”

“The Federal Government needs to overturn this decision, and we hope the Senate inquiry will force the Government to see sense and withdraw this unconscionable legislation,” she concluded.

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