

HESA REVIEW PART 1: CLUSTER FUNDING MECHANISM AND PIPELINE ARRANGEMENTS

SUBMISSION BY THE COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES (CHASS)

CHASS represents organisations working in the humanities, arts and social sciences disciplines in universities and elsewhere, and thus represents people and organisations working in 7 of the Funding Clusters. We consequently have a considerable interest in the review. On the other hand, individual member organisations will have a more focussed and expert interest in discipline-specific issues. This submission is therefore restricted to some broad issues of principle that cut across relevant disciplines. We wish to make five points.

1. Levels of Funding

We understand that the level of funding is not a part of the review. However, if the government is to make decisions about reallocation across disciplines at a time when the cost and demand pressures on all disciplines continue to rise, it would be very difficult to act if there have to be losers as well as winners in absolute terms. A commitment to no absolute reduction in any discipline, and hence additional funding to be applied to disciplines where costs have increased most in relative terms, would seem to be the only realistic option.

2. Impact of HECS-HELP Levels

Although the level of HECS-HELP has also been excluded, from the point of view of higher education providers, the CGS funding and student contributions have to be considered together. If a student contribution is frozen in a particular discipline for policy reasons, the CGS funding needs to be adjusted to ensure the total is not reduced. Otherwise the intention of the freeze – presumably to encourage demand - will not be met.

3. Funding of Cross-Disciplinary Study

CHASS has a particular interest in ensuring cross-disciplinary education (both within the HASS disciplines, and with the 'STEM' – science, technology, engineering and medicine – disciplines) is encouraged (cf, in relation to research, our DEST-funded report *Collaborating Across the Sectors*). Under the existing arrangements, where cross disciplinary study is required or encouraged, we understand the management and prediction of demand can be extremely difficult. This is particularly the case when students are provided with elective cross disciplinary choices, where variations from year to year may result in one discipline being over and another under, with financial sanctions for each. However, the concern does not only apply to elective study. It may also inhibit a university's capacity to respond quickly to the need and demand for certain specialisms within a broad professional field (eg, education, journalism, management, law) where cross disciplinary study is not elective but designed explicitly into the course structure.

4. 'Clinical' Placements

We note that a special focus of the review is the funding of 'clinical' disciplines. As we understand it, the term 'clinical placement' is in fact used under the cluster funding arrangements to refer to several programs where there is a practical, field or industry-based component – so that it covers for example teacher education as well as nursing and medicine. However as the term is used in the discussion Paper it appears to relate only to health disciplines (see p5, para 4 in particular). We believe that the issue of practicums, industry-based training, field work (whatever terminology is used) needs review in all relevant disciplines.

This is a particular problem in teacher education, which is required to fund school placements (as discussed in the submission from the Deans of Education) but also in many other areas in our sectors – several are identified in the submission from the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) including archaeology, applied linguistics and social work, and we would also add conservation (see the recent report of the Collections Council of Australia).

The third and fourth issues interact. The Administrative Guidelines of HESA may make certain professional fields reluctant to encourage students to study outside their faculty or department since industry and 'clinical' (in the broad sense) placements must be funded from the university based units of study. If a faculty/departments only teaches 75% of a course, they will draw the cost of the placements from that 75% of the enrolment income, if they teach 100% of the course, they draw the cost of the placements from 100% of the enrolment income.

5. Postgraduate Courses

The current lack of discrimination between undergraduate and postgraduate courses is problematic. In general, postgraduate courses will be of shorter duration than undergraduate courses, and so many of the fixed costs for a course (including recruitment, selection, admission, graduation and ongoing information provision) have to be borne from a shorter enrolment period. In particular, some postgraduate courses provide an intensive fourth year of pre-service education for professional accreditation and the reduction in income makes it impossible to fulfil the professional requirements without significant cross subsidisation. CGS income for the Post Graduate Diploma in Psychology, for example, is less than one third what it was under the RFM (reduced from cluster weighting of 3.0 to 1.3). These courses are subject to stringent accreditation demands including specifying the nature of facilities and staffing patterns.