



Asian Studies  
Association  
of Australia

## **ASAA statement on proposed Commonwealth university funding arrangements**

The Asian Studies Association of Australia expresses its grave concern at changes to university funding and fee arrangements announced by the Commonwealth Education Minister Dan Tehan on June 19. The Association believes that these changes will provide strong disincentives to students wishing to learn about the history, politics, culture, and societies of Asia, and will undermine the goal – repeatedly endorsed by successive federal governments – of training Asia literate graduates.

The changes announced are complex, involving dramatic increases and reductions in government support for a range of university courses, and equally dramatic increases and reductions of fees charged to domestic students. Overall, government funding per student falls by almost \$2,000 (from \$11,953 to \$10,070) and overall funding per student (once student contributions are taken into account) received by universities also drops by \$1,208. Of particular concern, fees are increased dramatically for students seeking to study in a range of social science and humanities disciplines (with fees more than doubling, to \$14,500 per annum).

A welcome change is that government funding will increase and fees will decline for language training (even so, there will be a slight net decrease in funding per student for language studies). This change will make it cheaper for students to study a language. It is unlikely, however, to stem long-term declines in the numbers of Australian students studying a range of Asian languages at university level, given that most language students also study humanities and social sciences and there is an absence of initiatives to promote the study of Asian languages at Australian schools.

Overall the changes have the potential to do serious damage to the promotion of Asia literacy through Australia's university system.

The decrease in government and net funding for teaching will have a deleterious impact on the quality of teaching across Australia's university sector.

The spike in fees for students in social science and humanities disciplines will be a strong disincentive for students who wish to study the societies, cultures, history, politics and security contexts of Asia. Asian Studies courses, and most courses with significant Asia content will now be in the most expensive band of courses offered at Australian universities, reversing historical patterns.

Viewed from the perspective of fostering Asia literacy these changes lack coherence: they provide incentives for students to learn an Asian language, but simultaneously

drive them away from courses where they can learn about the societies using those languages and acquire the contextual knowledge needed to make their language skills useful in the job market.

Overall, the ASAA believes these changes will harm the goal of fostering Asia literacy, as well as damaging the study of social sciences and humanities more broadly.

We urge members to contact your members of parliament to urge them to reject these changes.

Professor Edward Aspinall  
President, Asian Studies Association of Australia.  
On behalf of the ASAA executive.

\*This statement was amended on 25 June 2020, deleting a sentence stating that average cost of teaching per student would exceed average funding per student. The original statement reflected advice offered by the government, which has subsequently released new data suggesting this would not be the case