



Australian Academy of the Humanities

Backing Australian Thinking

To position Australia and its citizens to thrive, the Australian Academy of the Humanities calls on our next government to **back Australian thinking**.

The Australian electorate, by and large, **“backs Australian made”** when it comes to manufacturing and innovation. But modern social and cultural challenges don’t receive the same profile. We call on the next Australian government to **“back Australian thinking”**.

As a sovereign nation, with a complex history and multicultural population, we must invest in understanding the human condition – on our own terms, in light of our own opportunities.

We need to think critically, test assumptions, and prepare our future citizens and workforce for a world in which neither democratic institutions nor social cohesion can be taken for granted.

- We need to understand our own history and the histories of others, if we are to navigate historic hatreds and conflicts – what has worked before, what has not, and why?
- We need expert eyes on our region. As the rules of international relations strain and bend, who is attuned to the consequential conversations among our Asian and Pacific neighbours?
- We need expert minds on AI. What do AI developments abroad mean for Australia? How do we adopt, adapt, and regulate AI in our national interests, so that all Australians benefit?

Repeal the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) package

[FACT SHEET](#)

The repeal of the JRG is the only urgent recommendation from the Accord that the Government has put to the side. It was meant to encourage more students into nursing and teaching.

Today, there are fewer nurses and teachers in the system than when JRG was introduced¹, and a generation of students, earning the degrees that drive industry and our services economy, are being slugged with a disproportionate – often doubled – debt, in a cost-of-living crisis.

The better, cost-neutral alternative is well understood. Higgins and Khemka’s 2024 modelling, as recommended by HECS architect Bruce Chapman, details a fairer system for student contributions without any impact on Government spending, likely *improvements* to the Government’s bottom line thanks to a reduction in bad debt, and cost neutral effects on universities.²

Action: replace the JRG with a fairer, more effective and efficient policy.

¹ [Australian Teacher Workforce Data, Initial Teach Education Key Metrics, 12 December 2024 release, downloaded 13/03/2025, ATWD Key Metrics and Australian Nursery and Midwifery Federation graduate Data Set, June 2024, \[anmf_graduate_data_set_june_2024.pdf\]\(#\), p. 19.](#)

² [HECS-HELP Prices and Distributional Equity: Price setting Based on Expected Future Income by Tim Higgins, Gaurav Khemka :: SSRN.](#) For Chapman’s recommendation, see, for example, his [Accord Report](#), “HECS-HELP: Setting Prices for Student Charges”, recommending Higgins and Khemka’s approach, then pre-publication.



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Cultural competence is a sovereign capability

FACT SHEET

Australia's postwar multicultural achievement was underpinned by investment in linguistic and cultural capabilities, which peaked in the 1990s. From broad capabilities in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, through to our world-leading Sinologists and Indonesianists, these capabilities enabled Australia to connect in our region, and the rest of the world.

This was a systemic achievement.

However, this legacy has been run down. A world class generation of linguistic and cultural capability is not being replaced. The ramifications for Australian society are cumulative.

At present, "market forces" play an outsized role in determining Australia's higher education and research decisions. Our research into Australia's China Knowledge Capability³ (funded by DFAT's National Foundation for Australian-China Relations) demonstrates that Australia's expertise, and literacy on China, has significantly declined, and is not being replaced. We know similar issues exist with our Indonesia capability and other nations in our region.

Most concerning is that we have no national policy or program to actively monitoring the situation.

Courses in culture and languages continue to close at an alarming rate. We need a higher education steward that can ensure our national sovereign capabilities are mapped, monitored, and developed in line with goals agreed between the government, universities, and wider civil society.

Action: That the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (or similar) take a strategic role, independent of universities, in considering the state of disciplines, to inform national coordination and planning.

Complexity is social, not just technological

The National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) is responsible for providing the Prime Minister and other ministers with critical science and technology advice. The Committee benefits from expert scientific membership, but not systematic multi-disciplinary advice.

The NSTC could not have a more important role, in grappling with the complex and pressing issues of our time, from energy transition and our response to Covid-19, to the development, management and regulation of Generative AI and the rising tide of misinformation, disinformation.

In its current term, the NSTC has benefitted greatly from the inclusion of a member with social and cultural expertise (Professor Genevieve Bell). We call on the new Government to update the Terms of Reference, to embed this expertise into the Committee's membership.

Action: Amend the Terms of Reference for the NSTC to incorporate social and cultural expertise, alongside scientific expertise.

³ Australian Academy of the Humanities (2023), [Australia's China Knowledge Capability](#). Canberra.