Submission from the Australian Council of Deans of Science (ACDS):

Consultation on the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill 2025

Key Messages

- **Student contribution for Arts degrees**: The ACDS supports the reduction of the student contribution for HASS.
- **JRG effect on funding for STEM**: Science and Engineering are underfunded compared to pre-JRG values by about $6k per student. The government contribution per student in Science and Engineering still lags behind pre-JRG values. The ACDS supports the IRU-proposed three-step approach to reform the JRG.

Introduction

The Australian Council of Deans of Science (ACDS) represents the leaders of science faculties, colleges and schools across Australian universities – we are the voice of university science. Our members lead science education and research in universities across a wide range of disciplines, including laboratory sciences, field sciences, computational sciences and interdisciplinary STEM programs.

The ACDS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill 2025.

1. Student contribution for Arts degrees

As a result of the Job Ready Graduates (JRG) package introduced in 2021, the biggest increase in student fee contribution occurred in the Social Sciences and Humanities. In these areas the student contribution more than doubled from 2020 ($6,684) to 2021 ($14,500). In 2026, the student contribution to Arts degrees remains amongst the highest across all fields of education.

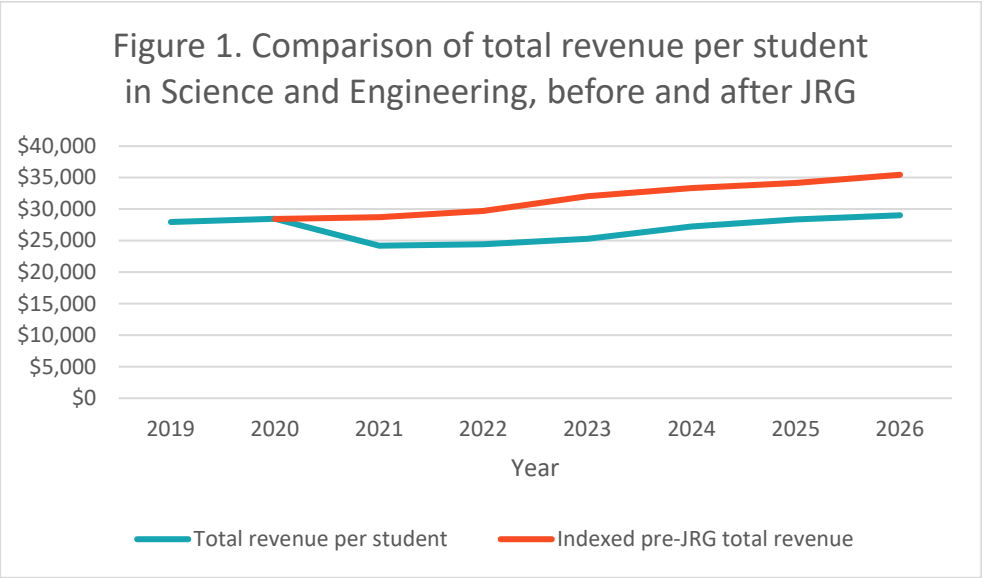
The ACDS stands with our colleagues in DASSH (Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities) to call for a reduction in the student contribution to Arts degrees. While domestic students can defer these fees, the cost still acts as a disincentive to entering university—particularly for students who are first in family or from low socio-economic backgrounds—and there is no evidence that the cost difference relative to STEM degrees incentivises students to choose alternative degrees. (A reduction in student contribution will need to be balanced by an increase in government funding to maintain overall financial support for Arts degrees.)

The ACDS urges a reduction in the student contribution for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS).

2. JRG effect on funding for STEM

The JRG package changed both the student contribution and the government contribution to funding for university degrees. Both components were varied up and down by different amounts according to the field of education. A key and often overlooked consequence was that some degree programs, including Science and Engineering, experienced a substantial reduction in total funding per student.

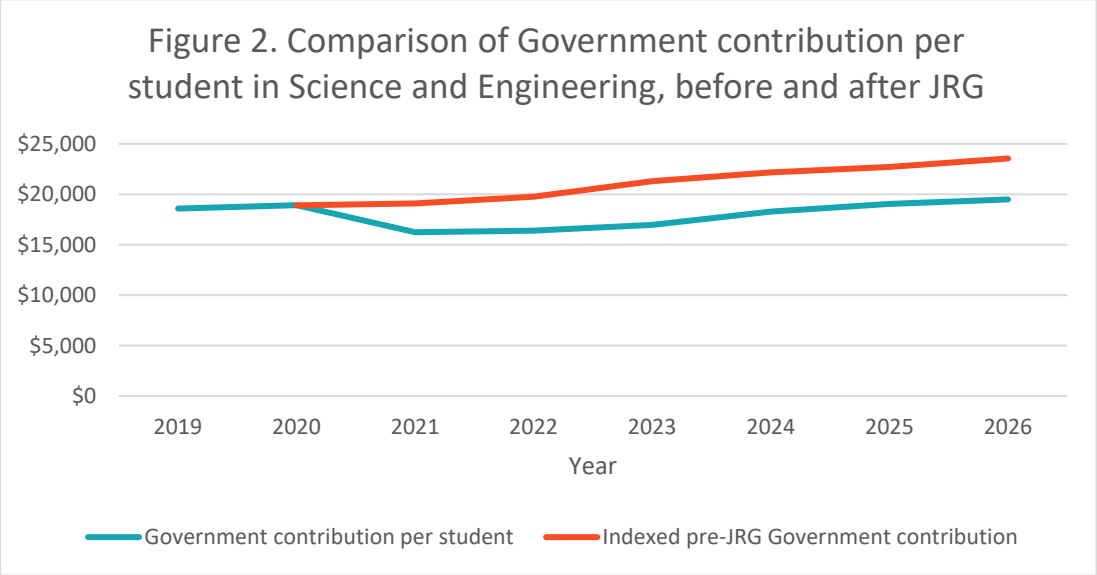
Figure 1 (based on Table 1 in the Appendix) shows how much the total revenue per student in Science and Engineering (including both the student and government contributions) fell compared to the indexed pre-JRG amount. The detailed numbers in the Appendix make it clear that **Science and Engineering are still underfunded compared to pre-JRG values by about $6k per student.**



Overall, Science and Engineering have suffered the biggest loss in total funding per student compared to nearly all other fields of education. This has caused many challenges for Australian universities and Deans of science as they manage their faculty budgets to deliver high-quality educational experiences across a diverse range of programs, many of which have a high cost of delivery. The reduction in funding to Science and Engineering resulting from the JRG has put pressure on the capacity of universities to deliver high-cost laboratory and field work experiences, which are the very activities essential for the development of Job Ready Graduates.

Commitment to reversing the funding reductions for STEM education would underpin and drive growth, innovation and productivity to support Australian industry and business and generate positive and long-lasting benefits across the National Innovation Pillars identified in the recent Ambitious Australia report (https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/ambitious-australia-strategic-examination-research-and-development-final-report).

Figure 2 (based on Table 2 in the Appendix) shows that **the government contribution per student in Science and Engineering still lags behind pre-JRG values**.



Whether this funding was previously used to partially offset the true costs of teaching, research or other university activities is an important topic for ongoing discussions between the government and the university sector. What is clear, however, is that the post-JRG funding shortfall does not appear to have been compensated for by the government. Meanwhile, industry investment in research has not increased significantly and income from international student fees is volatile, making long-term planning difficult. The ACDS strongly urges restoring the government's contribution to Science and Engineering to pre-JRG levels to support the full range of academic activities in science faculties.

In March 2026, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) released a paper exploring options around the JRG (see https://iru.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Impacts-of-the-Job-Ready-Graduates-policy-and-options-for-reform-IRU-analysis.pdf). Their suggestions take into account all fields of education, including Science and Engineering. **The ACDS supports the IRU three-step approach to reform the JRG.**

Conclusion

The ACDS welcomes the government's ongoing engagement on higher education reform and appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill 2025. We are committed to working collaboratively with government, universities and other stakeholders to ensure that funding and contribution settings support student access, educational quality and the long-term sustainability of Australia's science and engineering capability. The ACDS stands ready to assist further as reforms are considered and progressed.

Professor Brian Yates
ACDS Director of Strategic Communications and Engagement
Friday 10 April 2026

Appendix

Table 1 Revenue per student (Effective Full-Time Student Load or EFTSL) for Science and Engineering

Year	Student contribution[a]	Government contribution[a]	Total revenue	CPI %[b]	Indexed pre-JRG total revenue[c]	Difference
2019	$9,359	$18,586	$27,945	1.8		
2020	$9,527	$18,920	$28,447	0.9	$28,448	$1
2021	$7,950	$16,250	$24,200	3.5	$28,704	$4,504
2022	$8,021	$16,396	$24,417	7.8	$29,709	$5,292
2023	$8,301	$16,969	$25,270	4.1	$32,026	$6,756
2024	$8,948	$18,292	$27,240	2.4	$33,339	$6,099
2025	$9,314	$19,041	$28,355	3.8	$34,139	$5,784
2026	$9,537	$19,497	$29,034		$35,436	$6,402

Notes:
a. Funding rates are taken from https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-loan-program/approved-hep-information/funding-clusters-and-indexed-rates
b. CPI is for the 12 months to December in each year, taken from https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia
c. 2019 is used as the base year. For each subsequent year, the indexed value is the value from the previous year + CPI % from the previous year.

Table 2 Government contribution per EFTSL for Science and Engineering

Year	Government contribution	Indexed pre-JRG Government contribution[a]	Difference
2019	$18,586		
2020	$18,920	$18,921	$1
2021	$16,250	$19,091	$2,841
2022	$16,396	$19,759	$3,363
2023	$16,969	$21,300	$4,331
2024	$18,292	$22,174	$3,882
2025	$19,041	$22,706	$3,665
2026	$19,497	$23,569	$4,072

Notes: a. Indexation was applied using the same approach as in Table 1.