

Friday, 19 June 2020

Law Council President, Pauline Wright statement on the rising costs of law degrees

All comments to be attributed to the Law Council President, Pauline Wright.

While the lower fees announced by the government for STEM subjects will be greatly appreciated – especially by those with inclination and talents in those fields, the Law Council finds it disappointing to hear that the government has moved to raise the cost of a law degree by 28 per cent.

This will be a severe impediment for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds – and will add another barrier to those who are underrepresented in the legal profession, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, who may not be able to study law.

This will include Indigenous Australians at a time when we are facing a serious justice gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and it is undeniable that having more First Nations lawyers results in better outcomes for First Nations communities.

An increase of 113 per cent in fees for an arts degree – often studied in conjunction with law – diminishes the breadth of critical thinking within the student cohort. That will flow through to our society, with less people with the valuable analytical skills acquired in arts and arts/law degrees being available to benefit the myriad industries and professions they go on to work in.

The value of expertise in the humanities, including the law, cannot and should not be underestimated. The humanities teach us about how we live together and interact, whether historically, in the present day or into the future. The humanities enquire about the fundamental questions of what it is to be human.

To limit the study of these subjects to that narrow sector of society that can afford to pay high fees, necessarily limits diversity in perspective, and therefore the way our society understands and sees itself and narrows our vision for an Australia of the future.

It is well known that it is relatively inexpensive for a university to run a law degree – a law degree does not require laboratories or expensive equipment. We understand the need to promote tertiary courses that will drive growth in certain sectors, however this should not come at the expense of those who wish to pursue a career in the law, particularly those who may already find the fees difficult to manage.

ENDS

Contact: Dr Fiona Wade, P. 0419 097 896 E. Fiona.Wade@lawcouncil.asn.au

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