

21 October 2016

Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham
Minister for Education and Training
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: senator.birmingham@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

VET Student Loans Eligible Course List

As the peak body for Australia's \$2.5 billion live performance industry, we welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed eligible course list for VET Student Loans. We take this opportunity to express our serious concern with regard to the high number of live performance, and more broadly creative arts courses, that have been excluded from the list without proper consultation with our industry to ascertain our workforce needs.

While we support the Government's intention to "offer greater protections for students and provide access to quality higher level VET qualifications that address industry needs and create better opportunities for employment", we believe the lack of proper industry consultation has led to the exclusion of nationally reputable performing arts courses on the eligible course list. The exclusion of these courses may create unintended consequences that result in our industry's workforce needs being unmet in the long-term.

Minister for the Arts, Senator Mitch Fifield, spoke earlier in the year at an arts education conference on the critical importance of supporting a creative education and innovation agenda, stating that "the arts is not some luxury, it's not an add on...it's something that should be core to...education". It is important that the Department of Education and Training support this position by ensuring the new VET Student Loans scheme supports the skill requirements of our industry.

LPA wishes to raise the following concerns:

1. There are reputable courses that provide education and training in vital skills for our industry workforce that have been excluded from the eligible course list. This includes a range of VET qualifications in dance, musical theatre, live production design, circus, theatre, and performing arts overall. Many of these courses are provided by nationally recognised and highly-regarded institutions such as the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), and the Australian Institute of Music (AIM).
2. For live performance courses that are deemed ineligible for VET Student Loans, students that have access to the finance needed to pay the full course fee will be prioritised above those that do not have access to the significant funds needed to sustain enrolment in these courses without government assistance. This may create an inequitable education scheme that disadvantages and potentially locks-out prospective students with proven talent or merit due to their financial inability to pay upfront for these courses. Our industry depends upon the quality of talented and highly-skilled graduates from many of

the courses proposed to be ineligible for VET student loans under the new scheme, and as such the quality of our workforce in the long-term may be negatively affected.

3. Government needs to work together with and be guided by industry to ensure the VET Student Loan scheme adequately meets workforce needs. We are unaware of any consultation by the Department with our industry prior to the public consultation on the eligible course list, which allowed only two weeks to provide feedback. Due to the restrictive deadline for feedback to be submitted, LPA has not been able to consult with our Members to adequately gauge which VET courses produce graduates that meet the skill requirements of the live performance industry.

Industry stakeholders are in the best position to advise on how Australia's VET sector can best meet the needs of industry. As such, it is vital that the Department consult with the industry further on the new scheme and eligible course list before the scheme is implemented. As stated in the submission provided by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), we support their recommendation that the Government inform industry of the process by which courses are determined to stay on or be moved off the eligible course list, and allow suitable time for industry to provide feedback on how the scheme can best meet industry needs.

We request that the Department consult with industry stakeholders to determine how a new VET Student Loan scheme can best support our workforce needs, prior to any final decisions being made.

We look forward to liaising further with the Department of Education and Training, and Department for Communications and the Arts, on these very important issues.

Yours sincerely,



Evelyn Richardson

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Cc: Minister for the Arts, Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield

ABOUT LPA

LPA is the peak body for Australia's live performance industry. Established in 1917 and registered as an employers' organisation under the *Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009*, LPA has over 400 Members nationally. We represent commercial producers, music promoters, major performing arts companies, small to medium companies, independent producers, major performing arts centres, metropolitan and regional venues, commercial theatres, stadiums and arenas, arts festivals, music festivals, and service providers such as ticketing companies and technical suppliers. Our membership spans from small-medium and not-for-profit organisations to large commercial entities.

LPA has a clear mandate to advocate for and support policy decisions that benefit the sustainability and growth of the live performance industry in Australia.

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