

WHAT UNIVERSITY COSTS

Your degree was given a *price tag* in Canberra.

Same campus.

Same loan system.

*Very different annual student
contributions.*

WHAT YOU'RE CHARGED

Same campus.
Same loan system.
**Nearly four times the annual
student contribution.**

Set by Canberra, not by your university.

BAND 4 · ARTS, LAW PER YEAR

\$17.4k

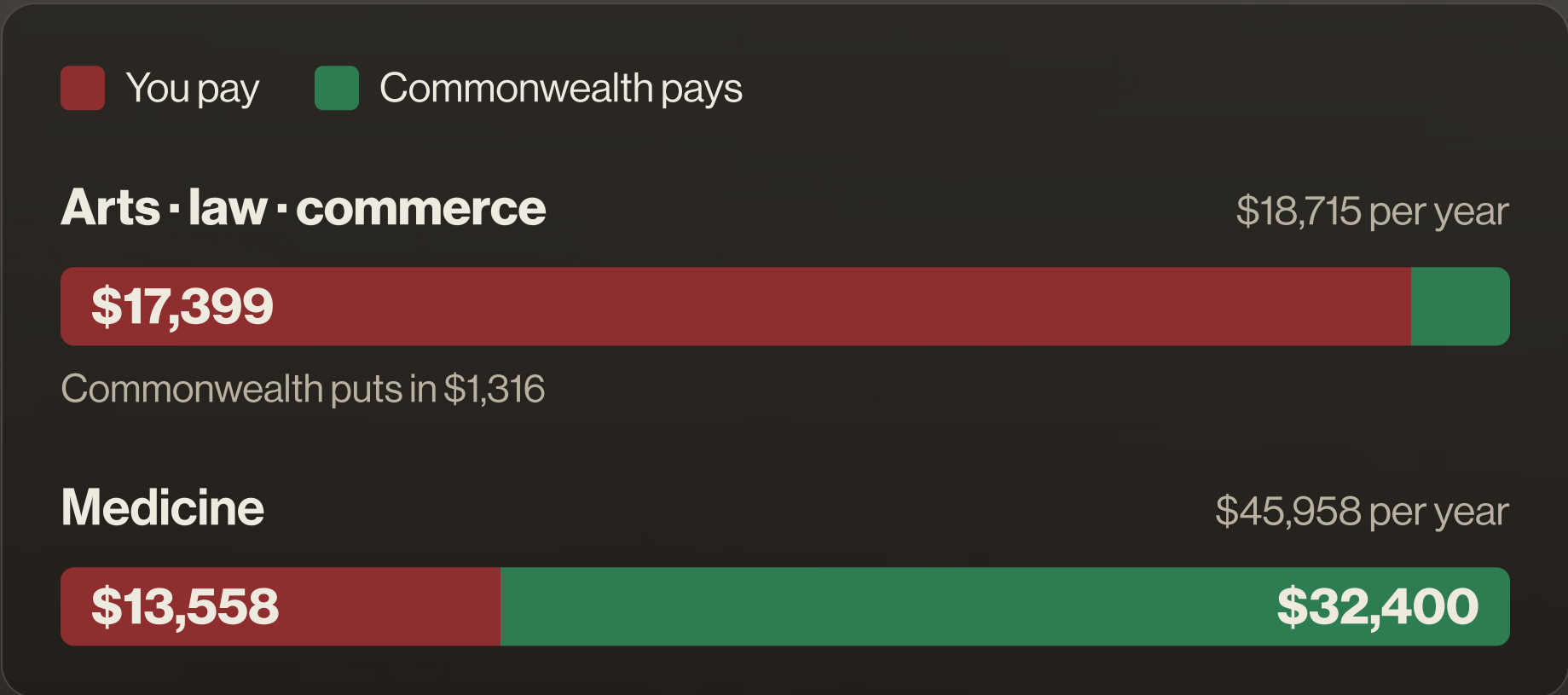
BAND 1 · NURSING, PER YEAR
TEACHING

\$4.7k

THE HIDDEN MACHINE

In the highest-charging fields, students can carry up to 93% of the funded cost.

The Commonwealth share can fall to as little as 7%.



THE BANDS

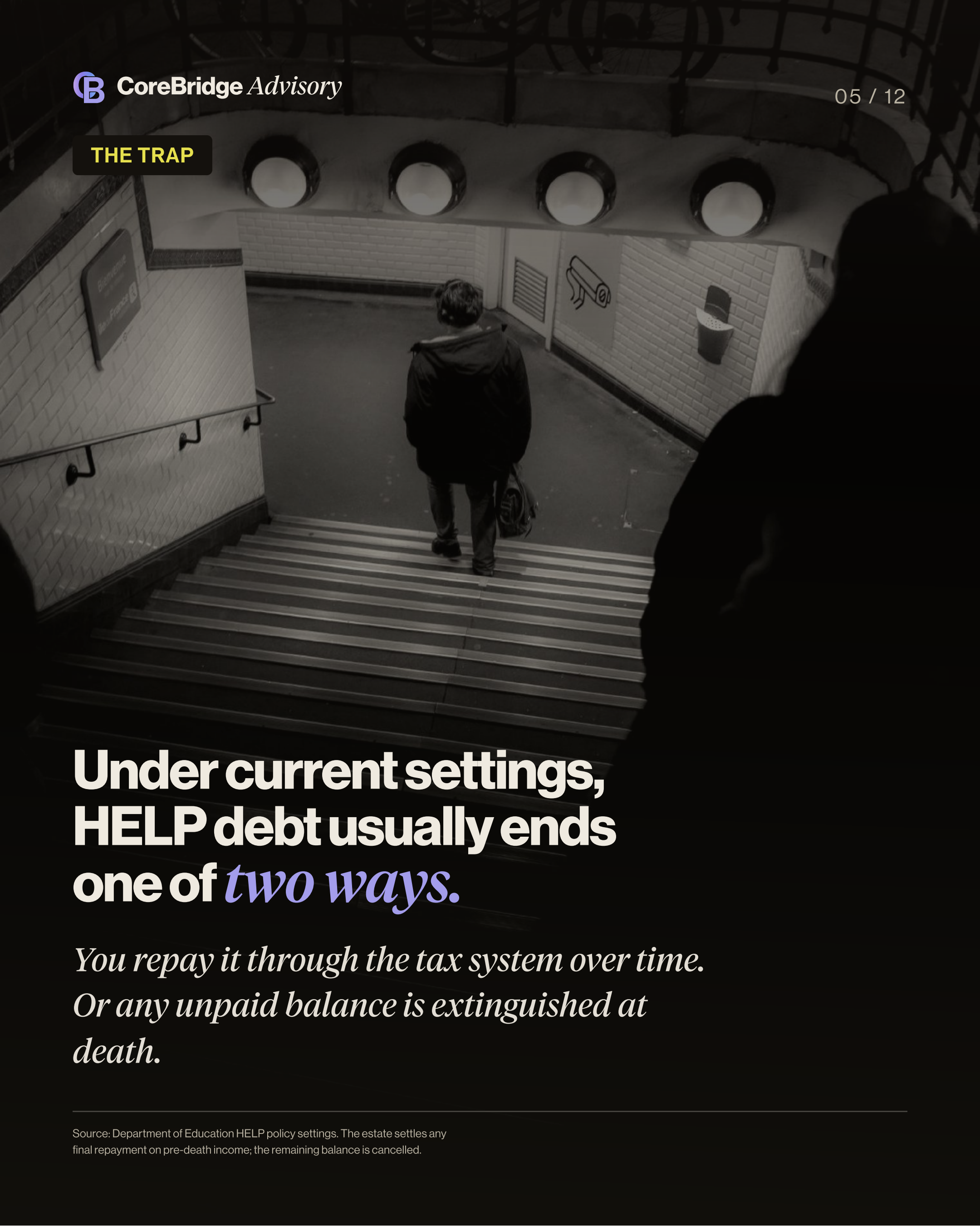
In 2020 Canberra priced degrees by what it wanted you to study.

Not set by teaching cost alone, and not by what graduates actually go on to earn. Every figure is debt the student carries.

FIELD	DEBT / YEAR	3-YEAR DEBT
Arts · law · humanities · business	\$17,399	\$52,197
Medicine · dentistry · veterinary	\$13,558	\$40,674
Science · engineering · computing	\$9,537	\$28,611
Nursing · teaching · maths · languages	\$4,738	\$14,214

Source: Department of Education, student contribution indexed 2026. Law, engineering and medicine run four to six years, so real totals run higher.

THE TRAP



**Under current settings,
HELP debt usually ends
one of *two ways*.**

*You repay it through the tax system over time.
Or any unpaid balance is extinguished at
death.*

IT FAILED

The lever did little. *The cost just moved.*

STUDENTS WHO CHANGED THE COURSE THEY CHOSE

about 1.5%

It cut about **\$1.2 billion** from the Commonwealth. Students paid \$368 million more, and universities were left \$813 million worse off.

Sold as making graduates more job-ready. In practice, it mostly redistributed burden instead of fixing the funding model.

WHO IT FALLS ON

The burden compounds for the same cohorts, three times over.

-19.7%

low-income enrolments in the dearest band, against -8.2% for everyone else.

37 vs 30

a humanities graduate clears the debt at 37. A nurse at 30.

25+ yrs

One in four creative-arts and humanities graduates take more than 25 years to repay, still paying into their 40s.

The effect concentrates among lower-income graduates, women, and public-good professions.

THE TWIST

The humanities are not an indulgence.

RATED HIGHLY ACROSS EVERY DOMAIN

Society and culture graduates scored 89.2 to 94.9% with employers, across every skill domain.

Source: QILT Employer Satisfaction Survey, 2024.

01 *Judgement, ethics, language and persuasion: capabilities that remain hard to automate well.*

02 *They run the country quietly: policy, public servants, journalists.*

03 *The moment demands them: the Indo-Pacific shift runs on language and governance.*

It's the capability we *taxed by mistake.*

THE LONG SHADOW

The debt follows many graduates into the first-home and first-child years.

35

median age of final repayment, up from 33, now in the first-home and first-child years.

40 yrs

the lowest-paid could take to clear under the new system, up from 32.

*The same women repay slowest and retire poorest: the mechanism behind the **25% gender super gap**.*

Women earn about **78.9 cents** in the male dollar, and take around 13 years to clear HELP against 10 for men.

Women's super, 60–64

\$189,900

Men's super, 60–64

\$254,600

THE EVIDENCE AT SCALE

The sector pattern is in the data.

37.4%

public share of tertiary funding:
41st of 42 in the OECD.

\$12,655

structural loss per domestic
place.

TOTAL ANNUAL FUNDING GAP · COREBRIDGE ESTIMATE

~\$10.2B

The annual gap the
sector must cover to
hold today's system
in place.

SEE IT FOR YOURSELF

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