



Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Thursday 5th September 2024

Dear the Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024.

Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) has over 1,100 members across Australian and New Zealand Universities and is the peak body for supporting student and staff facing practitioners across the sector. Our membership has been highly engaged in the University Accord process, with over 1,600 people within and outside of our practitioner community attending EPHEA's webinar where the Final Report was discussed.

EPHEA welcomes the following amendments:

- (1) HELP indexation - The adjustment to make HELP indexation the lower of the Consumer Price Index or the Wage Price Index, backdated to 2023, is a positive step in addressing the financial pressures on students.
- (2) Practicum payments - introducing government-funded practicum payments will help alleviate student poverty and financial distress during placements.
- (3) new Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding cluster for FEE-FREE Uni Ready courses - The introduction of a funding cluster for Fee-Free Uni Ready courses is an important measure to support student preparedness and access.

There are some considerations that EPHEA would like the Federal Government to consider in the implementation of these amendments.

HELP Indexation

EPHEA supports the changes to HELP indexation, however, we would like the government to consider further measures to support gender diversity. This could include a freeze on indexation for people who are on parental leave.

Practicum Payments

Whilst EPHEA supports government funded Practicum Payments to address student poverty and financial distress whilst going on placement, we would suggest the following amendments to the bill:

- (1) **Centralized Administration:** Federal Government services, such as Centrelink, are better positioned than universities to award these placements. By taking a national approach this would:
 - a. Reduce duplication in administrative costs across all Australian Universities.
 - b. Ensure consistency in the assessment model, to enable equal access to the placement grants.



In administering the grants, Centrelink would need to adopt an approach where these payments were paid in a timely manner, and possibly upfront to a student, to reduce the risk financial pressure for students.

- (2) **Expansion of Eligible Disciplines:** although the focus on nursing, care, and teaching is crucial, other fields like nutrition, psychology, medicine and veterinary science also require substantial placements. Additionally, with the increasing integration of work-integrated learning into curricula, expanding financial support to other disciplines would significantly enhance graduate outcomes.
- (3) **Reviewing the payment amount:** Students who are engaging with compulsory placements have a diverse set of needs, which need to be reflected in the placement amount. This includes, students travelling to and from regional, rural and remote communities, as well as students who have caring responsibilities.

Fee-Free Enabling

EPHEA welcomes the introduction of Fee-Free Enabling and the changes in 2025, including the increased funding available to universities per ETFSL.

In the development of the 2026 Fee-Free model, we would strongly encourage the Department of Education to consider a model that:

- (1) **Increases allocations:** Allows for an increased allocation to all universities, enabling them to offer a greater number of fee-free enabling places.
- (2) **Aligns enabling offering with the AQF.**
- (3) **Integration with schools and vocational education providers:** A model is developed in partnership with schools and vocational education providers that considers the variety of senior secondary pathways and how they integrate with enabling offerings.
- (4) **Best Practice Models:** Identifies and implements models of best practice to ensure the delivery of high-quality enabling programs at scale across the nation.

Thank you for your time in reviewing this submission.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kylie Austin' in a cursive script.

Kylie Austin

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