



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Senate Education and Employment Committee reports:

Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures)
Bill 2024

and the

Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the
Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023

and the

Education and Other Legislation Amendment (Abolishing
Indexation and Raising the Minimum Repayment Income for
Education and Training Loans) Bill 2022

MAY 2026

Overview

The Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024 (the Universities Accord Bill) and the Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023 respond to recommendations from the Australian Universities Accord (the Accord) and the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report.

The Education and Other Legislation Amendment (Abolishing Indexation and Raising the Minimum Repayment Income for Education and Training Loans) Bill 2022 was introduced by the Australian Greens Party.

Preparation of Government response

In line with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's (PM&C) tabling guidelines, the Australian Government is not required to respond to recommendations to pass, not pass, or amend a Bill, as this is a matter for the Senate.

Education and Employment Legislation Committee report into the Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024

The Government supported the recommendation of the Senate Education and Employment Committee to pass the Universities Accord Bill.

Additional comments were made by Greens Senators which included three recommendations.

Education and Employment Legislation Committee report into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023

The Government supported the recommendation of the Senate Education and Employment Committee to pass the Accord Interim Report Bill.

A dissenting report made by Coalition Senators provided five recommendations.

Additional comments were made by Greens Senators which included 11 recommendations numbered 2 – 12.

Education and Employment Legislation Committee report into the Education and Other Legislation Amendment (Abolishing Indexation and Raising the Minimum Repayment Income for Education and Training Loans) Bill 2022

The Government supported the recommendation of the Senate Education and Employment Committee not to pass the Indexation Bill.

Additional comments were made by Coalition Senators which included one recommendation.

A dissenting report made by Greens Senators included five recommendations.

Australian Government response

The Accord was the biggest and broadest review of the higher education sector in 15 years. It sets out a blueprint for higher education reform for the next decade and beyond.

High and growing student debt was recognised by the Accord as a financial burden on individuals that is exacerbating current cost of living pressures. The Accord found that negative perceptions of growing student debts may discourage future students from participating in higher education.

To address these concerns, the Albanese Labor Government has delivered a 20 per cent cut to student debts incurred on or before 1 June 2025, benefiting more than 3 million Australians. It particularly helps younger Australians, with around 70 per cent of people repaying a student loan being 35 or younger. The reduction is part of broader changes to make the student loan repayment system fairer and delivers significant and immediate cost of living relief to Australians with student debt.

The Accord also recommended reducing the financial burden of repayment of education related debts on low-income earners, and limiting disincentives to work additional hours by moving to a system of HELP repayment based on marginal rates. To address this, the Government has introduced a fairer repayment system for HELP debts and other student loans, by increasing the minimum repayment threshold from \$54,435 in 2024-25 to \$67,000 in 2025-26 (which will continue to increase each year with the growth in wages).

The Government has introduced a marginal repayment system where compulsory student loan repayments are calculated only on income above the new \$67,000 threshold rather than having it based on a percentage of their repayment income.

Helping more Australians into a home is one of the Government's highest priorities. People with a student loan should be treated fairly when they want to buy a house. The Government asked regulators and banks to review guidance on student loans to make it easier for them to responsibly take out a mortgage and buy a home. The Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) has made targeted changes to how banks treat student loan repayments when assessing home loan applications. APRA has issued revised reporting standards and a prudential practice guide to make it fairer and easier for those with a student loan to get into their own home.

This builds on the significant reforms the Government has already implemented. In 2024, the Government wiped \$3 billion of student debts and fixed the system so that the indexation on student debts can never increase faster than wages. The Government has also established new Commonwealth Prac Payments to support about 73,000 eligible teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work students while they are completing their compulsory practical training at university or through VET. The Government has also expanded Fee Free Uni Ready courses to help more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to get a chance at going to university.

Through the Fee-Free TAFE Skills Agreement, the Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, is delivering a combined investment of over \$1.5 billion for 500,000 Free TAFE and VET places across Australia from 2023 to 2026.

The Government has also made Free TAFE a permanent feature of the national VET system, investing over \$1.6 billion to 2034–35 to support at least 100,000 places per year from 2027, underpinned by the *Free TAFE Act 2025*.

The Government has removed the previous Coalition government's punitive '50 per cent Pass Rule', which did not include requirements for higher education providers to improve the quality of education or offer other supports to assist students to successfully complete their studies. This requirement disproportionately impacted students from low socio-economic backgrounds, First Nations students and other students from under-represented or educationally disadvantaged cohorts.

The Government replaced this unfair Rule with a requirement for higher education providers to have a Support for Students Policy. This strengthened accountability and reporting requirements for higher education providers to ensure students are properly supported to study and to pass. It also ensured higher education providers that fail to meet the new requirement would be subject to compliance action, including possible financial penalties.

The Government has passed legislation that guaranteed all First Nations students (excluding medicine), regardless of location, a Commonwealth Supported Place when accepted into their chosen course of study. In 2024, First Nations commencements increased by 7 per cent and total First Nations enrolments increased by more than 5 per cent. In 2026, the Government extended this to every First Nations student who meets the requirements to study medicine. Growing the First Nations medical workforce is an important step in improving healthcare outcomes for First Nations communities.

The Government has moved to provide greater support and flexibility for higher degree by students through the Higher Education Support (Commonwealth Scholarships) Guidelines 2025 (CSGs) which commenced on 3 December 2025. The CSGs include the requirement for higher education providers (HEPs) to provide an increased minimum paid parental leave entitlement for Research Training Program (RTP) stipend scholarship recipients who are the primary carer of a child.

In 2025, Commonwealth and State and Territory Education Ministers established an Expert Council on University Governance to develop new Principles and Recommendations to strengthen university governance. Education Ministers have considered the Expert Council's Principles and Recommendations to inform actions the Government is taking to improve university governance. This includes embedding Principles in regulations and requiring universities to report against them on an 'if not, why not?' basis, alongside other steps to improve accountability, transparency, engagement and representation on university governing bodies.

The Australian Government has established the independent National Student Ombudsman (NSO) to investigate and resolve student complaints about universities. The NSO commenced operations on 1 February 2025 and is providing guidance to universities to improve their complaints-handling practices. The NSO has strong investigative powers and can make recommendations to a provider about the actions that should be taken to resolve a complaint. The NSO has the power to monitor a provider's implementation of its recommendations, as well as share information with relevant regulators to provide the basis for potential compliance action where necessary.

If a provider does not take appropriate action in response to NSO recommendations, the NSO is able to provide the Minister for Education with a copy of an investigation report for tabling in Parliament. The NSO reports annually on complaint volumes, complaints outcomes and compliance with recommendations.

Additionally, the Australian Government has passed legislation to establish the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence* (National Code). This landmark reform sets 7 clear, legally enforceable standards that higher education providers must meet to effectively prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including in student accommodation. The Australian Government has established the Higher Education Gender-based Violence Regulator to hold higher education providers accountable for compliance with the National Code. The National Code commenced on 1 January 2026.

Australian Greens Senators additional comments and recommendations

Universities Accord Bill

Recommendation 1. That the government immediately reverse the Morrison-era Job-Ready Graduates scheme's fee hikes and funding cuts.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 2. That the government commit to wiping all student debt, including debts resulting from the Student Financial Supplement Scheme, and making university and TAFE fee-free.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 3. That payments for mandatory placements are implemented early and expanded significantly. The payments must be:

- **enshrined in legislation as a legal entitlement;**
- **available to all students in all courses that require mandatory placements;**
- **universal, and not means-tested;**
- **paid at least at the national minimum wage; and**

commence from 1 January 2025.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Accord Interim Report Bill

Recommendation 2. Make all First Nations students eligible for Commonwealth-supported places for postgraduate coursework degrees for Table A providers.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 3. Implement an independent taskforce with strong powers to oversight universities' policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual violence on campus and in residences, including to provide:

- **An effective and accessible complaints process**
- **Meaningful accountability for both universities and residences if standards are not met, and**

Transparency around which institutions are providing appropriate and effective responses and prevention initiatives.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 4. Commission an independent review of the of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's response to sexual violence on university campuses.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 5. Reverse the fee hikes and funding cuts introduced as part of the Job-ready Graduates package.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 6. Abolish indexation on all student debt.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 7. Raise the minimum repayment income for student debt to the median wage.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 8. Ensure students are paid for mandatory placements.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 9. Raise PhD stipends.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 10. Extend paid parental leave to PhD students.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 11. Scrap the idea of a levy on international student fee income.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 12. Boost government funding to universities and link it to ensuring increases in secure, permanent and ongoing employment for staff.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Indexation Bill

Recommendation 1. Indexation on all student loans be abolished.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 2. The minimum repayment income be raised to median wage.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 3. The SFSS debt should be completely wiped.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 4. Reverse the fee hikes and funding cuts introduced as part of the Job-Ready Graduates Scheme.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 5. That the Senate passes this bill.

No response required.

Coalition Senators additional comments and recommendations

Accord Interim Report Bill

Recommendation 1. Coalition senators recommend that the bill not be passed in its current form.

No response required.

Recommendation 2. Coalition senators recommend that the 50 per cent pass rule be retained but amended to provide that students only become eligible to lose their Commonwealth supported place if they fail to pass 50 per cent or more of units of study after two years of full time or equivalent study.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 3. Coalition senators recommend that universities be required to provide detailed reporting about the application of the 50 per cent pass rule (assuming such a rule is not abolished).

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 4. Coalition senators recommend that the provisions relating to the support-for-students policy not be passed at this current time so that the university sector has a proper opportunity to assess and consider the government's policy including the Guidelines and engage in further consultation as required.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Recommendation 5. Coalition senators recommend that the government urgently addresses and remedies the defects with the current regulatory framework concerning the support and safety of students, noting the Coalition's strong support for an independent student ombudsman with appropriate investigative, reporting and complaints resolution powers.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views presented to the inquiry and **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.

Indexation Bill

Recommendation 1. The Bill is not passed by the Senate. The Albanese Government apologise to Australian university students for failing to address acute cost of living pressures including skyrocketing power, grocery and housing costs which have impacted significantly on those seeking to undertake their studies at this time.

No response required.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions the Government is taking to support more students to participate and succeed in tertiary education, to deliver cost of living relief to Australians, and to build a better and fairer tertiary education system.