



Submission: Higher Education Support Amendment (Job Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020

Submitted by: The University of Notre Dame Australia

Email: pvcsp@nd.edu.au

Telephone: (08) 9433 0870

Date: 17 August 2020

The University of Notre Dame Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020.

Notre Dame supports the stated aims of the reforms of increasing the job readiness of graduates, increasing support for students to pursue study in national priority areas such as teaching, nursing and health, increasing university engagement with industry, and increasing the participation and attainment of students from Indigenous, low SES and regional and remote backgrounds in higher education.

Notre Dame has identified some aspects of the Bill that could act contrary to the stated policy aims of the Bill and reduce or limit opportunities for students from Indigenous, low SES and regional and rural backgrounds to participate and be successful in higher education, reduce the opportunities for students to develop the skills to succeed in the workforce and reduce the diversity within the higher education sector.

1. The announced reforms propose annual increases in CSP funding by a geographical growth factor to take into account population increases, and allow universities to match the needs of their communities and respond to the findings of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy. Notre Dame recommends that the Bill provide for all Table A and Table B universities that receive CSP funding to be included within this scheme. This will ensure that the number of CSPs available to students in the communities where Notre Dame operates is retained in real terms and that the diversity in the sector remains. If Notre Dame were not included it would simply replicate the issue that previously resulted from the Demand Driven System, and which had been addressed as part of these reforms; there would again be less opportunity and less student choice in the regions where Notre Dame operates.
2. The Bill introduces demand driven CSPs for regional and remote Indigenous people. All Table A and Table B universities that receive CSP funding, including Notre Dame, should be included in this scheme as it is essential that indigenous students in regional and remote areas, have genuine choice as to the university they attend, and where possible, have opportunities to study close to where they live. This reduces the impact of having to relocate from their region to study and improves the student experience and outcomes. Over time, it would result in more of these students practicing locally after graduating. Notre Dame is the only university campus located in Broome and the vast Kimberley region of Western Australia, where a disproportionately high number of indigenous people live. This campus has a strong focus on health programs and developing a rural and remote health workforce. Notre Dame also has a strong education and health presence throughout a number of regional and remote locations across Australia, which provides opportunities for prospective teachers and health practitioners to take their placements closer to their home community.

3. The Bill provides for the establishment of the announced Indigenous, Regional and Low Socio-Economic Status Attainment Fund (IRLSAF) by abolishing regional and enabling loadings, and widens the eligibility for 'other grants' that promote the equality of opportunity in higher Education, to include body corporates as well as Table A providers.

Notre Dame is currently eligible for regional loading and receives enabling loading to support students to access programs in national priority areas of teaching and nursing. In order to remain consistent with current provisions, and avoid eliminating Notre Dame's capacity to support students to access programs in national priority areas of teaching and nursing, eligibility of 'other grants' should be widened to include Table B universities that receive CSP funding, as well as body corporates and Table A providers.

If Table B universities were to be excluded, this would have the effect of reducing access for disadvantaged students, whether indigenous, low SES, or from a regional background, reducing genuine choice for students and reducing the diversity of the sector. Notre Dame's strong contribution to the development of the workforce in national priority areas of education and health makes it an important tertiary provider for students from these backgrounds. Notre Dame's regional sites and placements contribute to the local economies outside our metropolitan areas.

4. The Bill provides for the establishment of the announced National Priorities Industry Linkage Fund by reducing the amount of base CSP funding allocated as part of the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, and establishes a new grant category for the purpose of encouraging higher education providers to engage with industry.

Industry engagement is a core function of universities and is essential to developing job ready graduates, which is currently funded through base CSP funding. It is therefore critical that all Table A and Table B universities that receive CSP funding, be eligible for the new category of grants. This will ensure students will continue to have the same opportunities to undertake work placements and internships and develop the skills to succeed in the workforce.

Notre Dame's outstanding record in delivering work-ready graduates and higher retention and success rates means our ongoing participation in these programs will enable the Bill to better fulfil the stated policy objectives of greater equity and participation in the higher education sector.