Dear Professor Mary O’Kane, the Australian Universities Accord Panel, and the Office of Minister Jason Clare,

My name is Andrew Shim, and I am the Disability Officer of the Australian Law Students Association ('ALSA'), which is the peak body for Law students in Australia. Representing the disabled students among the roughly 40,000+ students in Australia, I am writing this email with the hope that it may reach key stakeholders, such as the Ministerial Reference Group of the Universities Accords.

We are writing to you as per the call to action listed in this ALHR media release (link: https://alhr.org.au/calls-for-reform-after-discrimination-claims/) on Sklavos v Australian College of Dermatologists [2017] FCAFC 128, as the status quo of anti-discrimination laws are contributing to the ongoing and systemic disability discrimination experienced by disabled students and disabled staff Currently, ALSA — in conjunction with two other peak bodies within higher education: the National Union of Students ('NUS') and the Australian Medical Students Association ('AMSA') — has released a key policy piece which calls upon stakeholders to undertake urgent reform within the higher education sector. In particular, we have identified — both from research and from student consultations — that disabled students & disabled staff at universities are experiencing disproportionately higher rates of sexual assault, discrimination, and neglect than their non-disabled counterparts. Released in November 2022, this policy piece — the ALSA-AMSA-NUS Research Report ('Disability & Higher Education in Australia' | link: https://allmeansall.org.au/means-joins-peak-student-bodies-advocacy-organisations-calling-systemic-reforms-disability-higher-education-australia/) — underscores the urgent need to redress structural ableism within higher education, which persists due to both the prevalence of attitudinal ableism and the lack of governmental instruments (such as a Disability Education Commissioner and anti-discrimination laws which prohibit ableist vilification on the basis of disability) which effect consequences for non-compliance.

Although Dr Linda Steele and Dr Paul Harpur have sighted the ALSA-AMSA-NUS research report, we are concerned that the Minister for Education and the Australian Universities Accord Panel is not yet aware of the report — as well as the findings and recommendations therein. Therefore, ALSA would like to formally submit — as a part of the Consultation on the Accord Terms of Reference — our research report (attached as both a PDF and Accessible Word version) to the Accords Panel regarding the priorities of the review in the context of the Terms of Reference.

Specifically, we would like to spotlight the following Key Area for the Accord Panel's prioritisation: 2. Access and opportunity; 4. Governance, accountability and community; and 6. Quality and sustainability We believe that in alignment with our research report, these key areas must be not only prioritised but also have enshrined within them an explicit focus on acknowledging and embedding the lived experience of disabled staff and disabled students. For the convenience of stakeholders, we have also attached a media release [web blurb version] — and as a peak body within higher education, ALSA is willing to participate in stakeholder engagements and roundtables as mentioned by the Department of Education.

As both the author of the ALSA-AMSA-NUS research report and as a LGBTQIA+, POC, autistic student with lived experience of mental ill-health and psychosocial disability, I am also willing to join, speak with, and/or contribute to the Ministerial Reference Group. In addition to this formal submission via the Department's portal for tabling submissions regarding the Terms of Reference's key priorities, a version of this message has also been emailed to AccordSubmissions@education.gov.au — as well as the Office of Minister Jason Clare. I would be more than willing to speak with the Accords Panel and any of the people CCed into the email version of this submission, not dissimilarly to the meeting scheduled between ALSA and the Australian Human Rights Commission ('AHRC') to discuss the research report's findings & recommendations regarding structural ableism within Australia's higher education system. If there are any questions or issues, please do not hesitate to contact me — — as I tend to be most responsive via SMS. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Nothing about us without us, AW Shim (He / They) Disability Officer, ALSA Research consultant on the Lived Experience Working Group ('LEWG') at the University of Sydney