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16 December 2022

Professor Mary O’Kane
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Dear Professor O’Kane

Thank you for the invitation to make a short submission on the priorities for the Accord in the context of the Terms of Reference. We greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and panel members along with other Western Australian senior university representatives to discuss the Accord process and some of our priorities.

We believe that the Accord process initiated by Minister Clare, represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make important changes to the tertiary system in Australia. Although this system already punches above its weight on the world stage, we can undoubtedly work together to contribute even more to the productivity of the nation and the wellbeing of our communities. Curtin University welcomes the opportunity to contribute.

At Curtin, we are committed to training the next generation of professionals for a stronger, more economically resilient Australia. We are also committed to nurturing the next generation of leaders who will work hard to enhance our economic prosperity, and the social, emotional, and environmental well-being of the nation. Curtin is a global university with an intentional geographic footprint embracing the Indian Ocean Rim. As such, we offer Australia an example of how we can deliver balanced benefits beyond our shores for generations to come without imbalancing our onshore campus experiences.

Please see attached for a table summarising our initial feedback. In developing our ideas, we have assumed that any changes that are made as a result of the Accord process, will need to fit (largely) within the current funding envelope. If additional funding is a possibility, there are other, potentially bolder suggestions we would be keen to provide.

As discussed with you during the meeting on 9 December, we would be happy to contribute to further discussions regarding:

- diversity of universities – (size, scope, geographic footprint and focus);
- the role that NCSEHE can play in meeting the Government’s aspirations for equity student success;
- the potential contributions the university workforce might make to society beyond the conventional confines of teaching and research, and
- ways in which we could work together to reduce the administrative or regulatory burdens that universities face.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like clarification or elaboration of the suggestions we have made.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Harlene Hayne CNZM
Vice-Chancellor

Universities Accord – Curtin Priority Areas (12/12/2022)

What is Working Well

- Globally, the Australian higher education sector has a good reputation, strong demand for our educational programs, and punches above its weight in research performance
- Universities have a clearly defined mission that is grounded in a legislative and regulatory framework
- Universities are self-accrediting, and are trusted by Government to fulfill their mission
- TEQSA has taken a very sensible, risk-based approach which has allowed universities to operate more freely
- Government has maintained a strong focus on equity participation, an objective at the centre of the mission of universities
- Government and universities maintain positive relationships and have aligned their effort to address areas of need
- Universities have been effectively managing research integrity. This has worked well and does not require Government intervention, regulation, or control

Opportunities for the Future

There is an opportunity to undertake a review, through the Universities Accord process, which takes a system-based approach. Rather than examining individual components of the system and making recommendations in isolation of each other, the Accord provides a unique opportunity to examine the interdependencies of recommendations that will optimise the design of a new eco-system for Australian higher education.

	Context	Short Term (1-2 years)	Medium Term (3-4 years)	Long Term (+5 years)
Equity Access and Participation	A key part of a university's mission is to enhance access and maximise the success of equity students.	<p>Support a demand-driven system for all First Nations People from any location-- not just from regional and remote locations.</p> <p>For all students, modify the current requirement that they must maintain a pass rate of at least 50% to continue as a Commonwealth Supported Student.</p> <p>Enhance funding arrangements and practice for enabling programs.</p> <p>Develop paid internships for students across the university.</p> <p>Provide stronger funding support to equity students to ensure they successfully complete programs.</p>	<p>Leverage the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) to identify and trial effective interventions that enhance student retention and completion.</p> <p>Strengthen access to higher education for people located in remote and regional areas.</p>	Place stronger focus on university collaboration to achieve equity outcomes, rather than an environment which promotes competition for equity students. Ensure State-based targets and incentives, are based on actual numbers of equity groups available for potential pipeline, to encourage collaboration in achieving targets.
Funding arrangements	<p>No University funding model will be perfect. A wholesale revision of the current funding model will undoubtedly result in some new unintended consequences. However, fine-tuning the JRG funding model could result in improved outcomes.</p> <p>Irrespective of the particular funding model, the sector requires a sustainable future. The current funding model drives Universities to endlessly grow enrolments to try and achieve a point of sustainability. The current model also relies on cross-subsidisation of a range of activity including mental health support, infrastructure, and research.</p>	<p>Examine the balance between Government and student contributions.</p> <p>The <i>Micro-credentials Pilot in Higher Education</i> announced on 9 November 2022 that will provide \$16.5 million from 2023-24 to 2025-26 to deliver micro-credentials to up to 4,000 students is welcomed. Ongoing Commonwealth funding of both micro-credentials and short courses (that have only been funded on a single year basis since their introduction in 2020) should be considered. If these courses are considered important pathways into Award courses, they should be funded on an ongoing basis and incorporated into the MBGA.</p> <p>Field work placements create additional cost pressures for the delivery of programs. Therefore new funding models should consider how this can be factored into the funding provided for affected programs.</p> <p>Clinical places create a significant constraint in growing numbers in priority areas (e.g., Nursing). A sector-wide solution is required to provide more places.</p>	<p>Develop a Performance Based Funding model which rewards achievement rather than deducting funding for failing to achieve targets.</p> <p>Review the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) to determine whether the current funding model (reduction of funding for not achieving goals) has delivered any performance change or just added regulatory burden.</p> <p>Redistribution of EFTSL from universities which are under MBGA to those over MBGA.</p> <p>Undertake examination of the HDR funding and costing arrangements to maximise outcomes.</p> <p>Any changes to the current funding model should enable and support inter-disciplinarity and global engagement.</p> <p>Review adequacy of regional and remote funding subsidy.</p>	<p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model which provides free higher education to society • Demand Driven system • Price deregulation for Commonwealth Supported Students, currently the Government sets a maximum fee the university can charge

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Regulatory Environment	Regulatory oversight by Government increases compliance cost for universities.	Streamline various reporting, performance, and compliance requirements (e.g., PBF, NPILF, HEPP, Short Courses, 20k Equity Places, student number estimation processes, Foreign Interference, Cyber Security).	As self-accrediting institutions Universities could be trusted to perform their role under broad objectives without the need to review, measure and report at a more detailed level. Improved coordination between State and Federal regulators to ensure a consistent approach.	De-regulated system for Universities, self-accrediting and operating in a market environment with minimal regulatory control (apart from qualifications frameworks), includes price deregulation.
International Education	International students have made an important contribution to Australia by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enriching our culture supporting skills shortage supporting our broader economy Higher Education remains one of Australia's largest exports.	Continue to support and protect Australia's global brand. With the return of international student demand, a sustainable approach to receiving international students from a diverse set of countries is required. Enable the export of higher education through appropriate visa processes and immigration options (e.g., post study work rights for students who study offshore at Australian universities).	Relax regulations for transnational and online study and enable students who take those options, opportunities for post study work rights and potentially immigration. This would enhance Australia's competitive position relative to other countries and build a more sustainable higher education sector.	
Research	Universities are either required or encouraged (implicitly and explicitly) to provide cash "leverage" to participate in the majority of government granting schemes for research. The amount is estimated to be ~\$1B p.a. This exacerbates the stress internally to source the funds for research salaries because a second fund of cash must be kept aside to support the leverage. Wealthier universities are advantaged by being able to leverage more, thereby making their proposals appear more attractive, irrespective of the inherent quality of the research and researchers in any given proposal.	Undertake a sector-wide analysis of government leverage of university funding into government grant programs and assess potential to consider advantages and disadvantages of an alternative approach. Consider making optional additional financial contributions to NCGP grants ineligible.	Develop and trial a monitoring and evaluation process to establish the value of alternative use of university research funding outside former required leverage. Capitalise on the under-utilised research capability Australian Universities present to solve "big" national problems. (e.g., water, COVID, bushfires). Establish Industrial-Academic type roles to build stronger connections with industry and a stronger alignment to industry needs.	Fully-funded Government research projects (rather than a co funded model).
	Domestic HDR student enrolments have not grown over the last seven years.	Identify the constraints/disincentives to domestic HDR demand and how they might be overcome. Is it value of a HDR degree, the cost, industry engagement/value?	Work with industry to create more realistic understanding/recognition of value to employer of HDR degree holders. Work with NCGP (ARC and NHMRC) to provide more innovative, stabilising Fellowship programs.	Build domestic HDR numbers.
	Australia needs a less burdensome, more effective and higher utility process to assess research performance and value for money.	Reassess ERA and develop a more automated (and potentially sample-based) assessment that is more flexible and applicable to FOR codes, individual researchers and a range of other assessment categories, e.g., major national/global challenges, SDG's.	Substantiate FoR code assessment and pilot individual performance assessment based on research outputs and connected impacts.	Link research funding increases to sustained performance improvement.
Student Experience and Voice	The student experience is a critical part of the value proposition for universities as alternative learning models emerge. The quality of student experience impacts on the reputation of the Australian higher education sector and is an important differentiator for the international student market. Student satisfaction levels in Australia significantly declined during Covid and are recovering at slow rates.	Enhance the engagement with students in decision making about their educational journey and experience by treating students as partners rather than customers Implement new methods to assess teaching satisfaction.	Mental health has emerged as a key issue in the student population. This needs to be examined and greater support mechanisms need to be developed.	
Academic Integrity	Contract cheating using AI is threatening the integrity and reputation of the Australian higher education sector.		Australia could position itself as a world leader in tackling contract cheating issues. This would ensure that Australian higher education is respected globally for its integrity and quality.	

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Higher Education Programs	Clarify the role of non-traditional educational programs (e.g., credentialing, micro-credentials, short courses) in the educational eco-system.	Role of short forms of learning needs to be clarified. With the emergence of many new forms of learning this space remains confusing for students and we need to understand how it aligns to the more traditional learning structures.	Develop a model for life long learning which provides a variety of clear and transparent pathways.	
Skills and knowledge gap	The Higher Education sector needs to be in a position to effectively respond to rapidly changing skills needs and knowledge gaps.	Need to ensure the Higher Education sector has the capacity, capability and flexibility to deliver against skills and knowledge gaps.	Provide a systematic and sustainable approach across Australia to life-long learning, to ensure longer term engagement in the workforce by more people, leading to increased productivity and response to skills needs and knowledge gaps. Develop a paid internship program.	Universities engaged with Government and Sector on longer term skills needs at a national level.
VET and Universities	Greater alignment between VET and Higher Education sector. State based pricing decisions (i.e., free TAFE study) creates uncompetitive practices.	Clear pathways for students to move between VET and Higher Education and Higher Education and VET. Currently articulation arrangements exist, but they are between individual providers and are not necessarily consistent across either VET or Higher Education sector.	Incentives for VET and Higher Education collaboration and integration.	