

**Sisters Inside Inc.**  
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*Sisters Inside Inc. is an independent community organisation which exists to advocate for the human rights of women in the criminal justice system*

15 December 2022

Australian Universities Accord

**Submitted online: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/consultations/higher-education-review>**

Dear Professor,

### **Higher Education Review Terms of Reference**

I write to you in relation to the Australian Universities Accord Higher Education Reviews Draft Terms of Reference. Sisters Inside welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Accord regarding the Proposed Terms of Reference. Sisters Inside plans to provide a much more substantive submission when the Terms of Reference are finalised.

### **About Sisters Inside**

Sisters Inside is an independent community organisation that exists to advocate for the collective human rights of women and girls in prison, and provide services to meet the needs of women, girls and their families. Established in 1992, Sisters Inside has 30 years experience supporting criminalised women and girls. Our submission is informed by our experience supporting women and girls in the criminal legal system through our programs and services.

### **2. Access and Opportunity**

As the voices of women are rarely heard behind prison walls, and the stigma of their incarceration silences them upon release, Sisters Inside seeks to see particular reference to criminalised women and girls in the terms of reference, particularly in regards to recommendations for new targets and reforms to support greater access and participation for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Criminalised women are overwhelmingly marginalised, impacted by poverty, violence, and systemic racism, which contributes to them being unable to access educational opportunities in the first place. Access then becomes more difficult once women are imprisoned, and a criminal history creates

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significant barriers to access when they are released.

The ability to gain an Education is a basic human right. It creates opportunities to improve life circumstances, yet there are significant barriers for women to access education within the carceral system, and disappointingly, universities themselves. These barriers continue post release with the unnecessary gatekeeping of universities, for example the requirement for a working with children clearance to enrol in a degree. It is imperative that Universities are actively seeking new ways to engage and support people in prison, and post release, addressing barriers and providing advocacy.

*“So far as is practicable, the education of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country, so that after their release, they may continue their education without difficulty.” UN Nelson Mandela Rules*

Thank you for considering this letter. If you would like to discuss this letter further, please do not hesitate to contact me on (07) 3844 5066.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Kilroy  
Chief Executive Officer  
Sisters Inside Inc