

14 December 2022

Professor Mary O’Kane AC
Chair, Australian Universities Accord

Dear Professor O’Kane

Go8 priorities for the Review of Australia’s Higher Education System

The Group of Eight (Go8), which represents Australia’s leading research-intensive universities welcomes the opportunity to provide this short submission to outline the Go8 priorities for the Review of Australia’s Higher Education System as part of the Universities Accord process.

Please also note that we are happy for this submission to be published and have no wish for any of it to be treated as confidential.

The Go8 is highly supportive of the work of the panel you lead in driving generational change in Australia’s world-class higher education sector that will set up the nation for a successful and prosperous future for the 2020s and beyond.

Collectively, the Go8 undertakes 70 per cent of Australia’s university-based research and invests over \$7.2 billion in research each year. We educate 425,00 students – both domestic and international – and graduate more than 110,00 students each year, including in key professions such as medicine, engineering, IT and computing, and in the humanities, arts and social sciences.

With respect to the Universities Accord Terms of Reference, the Go8 will respond to all seven key areas for review in a detailed submission. In working to these key areas, the Go8 will focus on one overarching priority and four specific priorities that will guide both the working underpinning our submission to the process and our ongoing engagement with the panel.

Go8 overarching priority – a true Universities Accord

We support an idea of an Accord, to underpin an ambitious reset of tertiary education policy and regulatory settings. The reforms need to be looked at holistically because of the interdependencies that underpin the system today. Reform recommendations should be designed to allow, over time, the performance of the system as a whole (and of individual providers) to be determined.

In delivering reforms, wherever possible, there should be a premium placed on simplicity, transparency, accountability and responsiveness to the changing needs of learners and the economy. A fundamental principle should be to encourage and enable local decision-making to align with specific local interests, to help promote provider diversity and equity of access.

Go8 Priority 1: Meeting Australia’s knowledge and skills needs, now and into the future through affordable investment (Accord ToR key areas 1 & 3)

- The core of these considerations, including affordability, is to ensure the sustainable quality of education provided by the Australian tertiary education system, including the quality of the student experience.

- The provision of quality education embraces all students – domestic and international – with the difference captured by the sources and level of funding provided to universities to deliver the education.

Go8 Priority 2: Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability (Accord ToR key area 7)

- That Australia’s university research effort strategically underwrites Australia’s economic, social and environmental well-being through sustainable funding structures, particularly for foundational curiosity-driven research and high skills development.

Go8 Priority 3: Access and opportunity (Accord ToR key area 2)

- Access and opportunity considerations must have a focus on models for building aspiration, supporting retention, success, a positive student experience, and degree completion for students from under-represented backgrounds.
- More broadly, there should also be a focus on how equitable access to tertiary education prepares students from under-represented backgrounds for success in work and life.
- Different models to deliver higher education in the regions and to regional students across the entire nation should be a focus for discussions.

Go8 Priority 4: The connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems (ToR Accord key area 5)

- Vocational Education pathways should be expanded and integrated into the higher education system as part of a renewed systems design approach for the future of post-secondary education in Australia.

In early 2023, the Go8 will be establishing expert working groups to find solutions in each of these priorities. As this work progresses, we will offer the Accord Panel the opportunity for briefings on both the background and the outcomes of the expert panel considerations.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of the Go8 submission further or engage in further consultation with the Go8, then please do not hesitate to contact me directly on [REDACTED].

The Go8 looks forward to engaging with you and the Universities Accord Panel during the course of 2023 in this critical nation building work.

Yours sincerely



VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE