



Australian
National
University

Submission to the Universities Accord Panel

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Office of Commonwealth and Government Relations

+61 2 6125 6885

commonwealth@anu.edu.au

The Australian National University

Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

www.anu.edu.au

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The Australian National University (ANU) welcomes the ambition of the Universities Accord Panel in calling for big and bold reforms to ensure Australia has the tertiary education and research system that can deliver the skills, sovereign capability, and human capital Australia needs to be competitive in the global economy.

The vision

To deliver the workforce Australia needs in the future and meet the learning aspirations of all Australians, the design of Australia's future tertiary education ecosystem must be student-centric and must be sustainably funded across teaching, learning and research. The ecosystem will have a strong research base, with public funding for basic and applied research, and research infrastructure.

Government priority setting and investment in tertiary education is coordinated. This will reduce the administrative burden and regulatory impost for tertiary providers and improve their accountability. Institutions engage with their communities and local industry to provide the graduates that communities and industry need.

Industry co-invests in university research that industry partners want to develop. And students benefit from work placements in industry during their study so that they graduate with knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the needs of the job market.

Students will be supported to study what they want, at the institution of their choice, and in the way that best suits their personal circumstances. There will be diverse and specialised institutions — university colleges, teaching only and research-intensive universities. Students can move between vocational education and training and higher education as prior learning is recognised. Governments and education providers share and collect data to understand what drives student choice of study and provider, and inform policies on student success.

Australia's research strengths and international reputation continue to grow. Researchers trained in Australian institutions are producing new knowledge to help solve global problems for the benefit of all. Australian universities are attracting the brightest students and researchers from around the world.

Elements of this future ecosystem

Student-centric

- A **single national admission framework** for vocational education and training and higher education to recognise prior learning and tertiary attainment levels, work experience, and life experience.
- A **review of student income support payments** to increase access and ensure there are no financial barriers for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and First Nations students.

- **Demand driven funding for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students** for study at the higher education institution of their choice. This will help to grow the number of First Nations academics and researchers and provide more role models to inspire First Nations students.
- **Public funding for domestic places** to be aligned to the actual costs of teaching and learning and that balances Commonwealth funding and student contributions.
- A national **flexible loan program** to replace the current patchwork of higher education loans, occasional government scholarship programs, and relocation support. Loans would be offered at differential rates by AQF level or courses, with higher rates for courses that are more expensive to teach, such as dentistry and veterinary science. **Loans would cover full financial need while studying**, including the costs of relocation for clinical placements, formal practicums or internships, and travel home between terms. In addition, students could access **incentives to take up certain courses** in response to market demand, work in certain regions of Australia, or provide seed funding to start a business. Repayment would be based on an assessment of capacity to pay and projected employment outcomes.

Research funding

- **Increase funding for research and development (R&D)** to at least the OECD average. As research is the foundation for teaching and learning, increased investment will drive economic productivity, support innovation, and sovereign industrial capability. Australia's gross expenditure on R&D as a percentage of GDP is 1.8 per cent, which places Australia below the OECD average of 2.7 per cent, the UK at 2.9 per cent, Japan at 3.3 per cent, and Israel at 5.6 per cent.¹
- Government funding for the **full costs of publicly funded research** to support pure basic research, which creates the pipeline of ideas to applied research breakthroughs and commercialisation.
- A **single national research funding body** to allocate grants against national research missions for all government portfolios. Specific funding rounds would allow for industry co-investment in infrastructure, innovation and fast-fail projects. Universities or industry would be able to bid for grants. This approach will ensure that pure basic research is properly funded and drive greater diversity, efficiency and accountability in research. It will require a significant change in the mindset of Government, the higher education sector and industry to work together in the national interest.
- A **redesigned Research and Development Tax Incentive** to incentivise industry investment in university research collaboration.

¹ <https://data.oecd.org/rd/gross-domestic-spending-on-r-d.htm>

- A restructured **Research Training Program (RTP)** that is focussed on quality to give institutions greater flexibility to support excellent domestic and international research candidates. **Increasing the minimum level stipend** to at least minimum wage would support HDR students when they need to be focussed on their research endeavour instead of balancing work and study. An increase to the overall RTP funding envelope would assist more PhD students.

International Education

- A **visa system** with simple rules to enable global talent acquisition for universities to recruit international academics and students.
- Students to access **skilled migration pathways for permanent migration** upon graduation. This will contribute to the global projection of Australia's soft power and influence and builds on the success of the new Colombo plan.

Lifelong learning

- **Subsidies for certain cohorts, age groups or mid-career professionals** to access courses for upskilling or reskilling. These could be topped up at regular intervals without expiration.
- **Reduced fee or free access to higher education courses** for unemployed, self-employed or those looking to return to the workforce.
- **Microcredentials** to be quality assured, portable and stackable across the tertiary sector. They provide just in time learning for those looking to upskill or over time, can lead to an award. Microcredentials would co-designed with industry to meet market needs.