



Queensland University of Technology

**Priorities for the Australian Universities Accord Panel's
*Review of Australia's Higher Education System***

QUT welcomes the Panel's consultation on the Accord Terms of Reference, which invites stakeholders to help set the priorities for this major overhaul of one of the nation's most important systems of human infrastructure, with profound implications for Australia's future economic prosperity, scientific sophistication, cultural flourishing, workforce productivity and civic cohesion.

We outline below the high-level priorities that QUT holds to be the most pressing for reform under each Term of Reference. We have heeded the Panel Chair's request for targeted commentary but would be pleased to elaborate on these priorities should that be of assistance.

QUT looks forward to working closely with the Panel as the Review progresses through 2023 and we wish it well in its deliberations.

1. Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs, now and in the future

- Urgently repeal the damaging JRG distortions to the discipline cluster funding system, replacing it with a temporary flat cost-sharing system based on the current best estimates of cost of provision
- Undertake a considered and comprehensive analytical review within the Accord process to establish a fair, effective and sustainable basis for setting discipline funding levels including the split between Commonwealth and student share
- Establish a national skills observatory that employs reliable, evidence-based means to forecast national skills needs across industry, government, the not-for-profit sector and the community
- Develop strategies to promote courses that address current and projected national skills needs – at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and for both initial higher education and lifelong learning – that recognise and value student interest and aptitude as central to success
- Support VET and Higher Education to provide offerings in regional areas for new skilled job opportunities and supporting the growth of the domestic workforce, including in emerging technologies and high-tech manufacturing
- Strengthen the relationship between schooling, the VET sector and Higher Education will reduce the barriers for under-represented groups, such as women upskilling to enter and sustain their place in the fulltime workforce
- Restore OLT and ALTC grants

2. Access and opportunity

- Add a focus on retention and success to the commendable focus on access and opportunity, recognising that for an individual student ‘success’ could be transferring to a more suitable course or career path outside formal education
- Reach potential students who have not considered higher education pathways
- Extend programs targeting rural, regional and remote Indigenous Australian students and potential students to all Indigenous Australians regardless of initial place of residence
- Review Student Equity Groups to take account of developments including emerging cohorts (e.g. Pasifika students, refugees and ‘students in care’) and make subsequent funding adjustments
- Design and fund specific, targeted and proven programs to assist students from various identified cohorts to adhere and succeed, ensuring Commonwealth programs do not impose a one-size-fits-all approach that risks producing sub-optimal outcomes for individual students
- Urgently repeal the JRG low completion rate exclusion from CSP (50% fail rule)
- Repair the student financial support system, such as
 - Urgently create a targeted program to support students on placement (e.g. teaching and nursing students) who cannot work to support themselves during these periods of essential qualifying workplace learning
 - Setting and index rates with reference to actual living costs
 - Reducing the age of independence
 - Funding genuine relocation expenses regardless of initial place of residence, including an up-front bursary for rental bond assistance
 - Reducing lead-time from application for Commonwealth support to receipt of funds (particularly for ABSTUDY)
- Review funding models to achieve equitable access to Widening Participation programs in high-cost locations (not accounted for in the HEPP formula)
- Full resourcing of support to realise targets for admission, participation and completion, including provision of appropriate accessibility services
- Improve access to other under-represented groups including the provision of education and training programs to prisoners, those who are culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ communities
- Flexibility of access to and completion of Higher Education courses for First Nations peoples
- Develop a national approach to Alternative Entry Pathways to help first in family students navigate individual institution’s alternative entry programs
- Improve data collection, discoverability and analysis

3. Investment and affordability

- As noted under ToRs 1 & 2, urgently repeal damaging elements of the Job Ready Graduates package to prevent unnecessary harm while the Review considers long-term settings
- Simplify sector funding arrangements
- Provide longer term certainty on the indexation arrangements of government funding
- Identify, disaggregate and establish targeted funding for the component of Commonwealth teaching and research funding that supports the operating expenses of public institutions
- Decouple the dependence on international tuition revenue of adequate public funding for university research
- Ensure the ongoing strength of discipline diversity across the system

4. Governance, accountability and community

- Promote sustainable workload management for both academic and professional staff
- Ensure feasible and equitable academic career progression
- Make a national investment to help reduce the reliance on sessional, short-term and casual appointments
- Establish a collaborative, sector-wide universities community contribution communications function, to inform the public of the valuable work and achievements of university researchers, teachers, students and graduates
- Strengthen student empowerment and advocacy for student affairs

5. The connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems

- Facilitate interoperability and bidirectional transfer between VET and HE systems
- Recognise and support the distinct and complementary missions and aptitudes of the two systems, ensuring that efforts to promote alignment do not conflate or collapse the distinction
- Adjust tuition support and student financial support mechanisms across sectors to avoid artificial differential incentives for students considering different tertiary pathways
- Improve the coherence, flexibility and interoperability of the AQF's constituent systems

6. Quality and sustainability

- Provide means for sharing best-practice in remote and blended learning, including work-integrated learning
- Boost means for revitalising the campus experience, including student-led initiatives and co-curricular activities
- Address visa processing delays to support international students and the national objectives of international education
- Clarify and extend post-study work rights for international students
- Taking a whole-of-government approach, ensure international education compliance requirements do not allow or encourage non-genuine student behaviour or predatory commercial conduct by education providers, while continuing to support student study choice. Specific measures should include:
 - Removing trailing visa risk by requiring the institution where the student is enrolled carries the risk implied under the Simplified Student Visa Framework (SSVF) rather than that which issued the Certificate of Enrolment (CoE)
 - Reducing the onshore withdrawal/transfer poaching market by extending to 12 months the current requirement for students to complete 6 months of their principal program
 - Establishing strong compliance and enforcement arrangements around the intersection of skilled migration and international education to mitigate the risk of reputational harm from non-genuine providers
- Bolster transparency and resilience of tertiary admissions systems, to support public confidence in their capacity to assure the quality of matriculants

7. Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability

- Meet the genuine full cost of research
- Ensure fundamental research is properly supported in order to protect the viability of applied research, including by rebalancing the ARC Discovery:Linkage funding ratio and by restoring the conception of the ARC Linkage Program as a distinctly and ecumenically *collaborative* scheme that supports university-university as well as industry-university collaboration
- Recommend to Government an independent review of the Medical Research Future Fund to examine its methodologies, impacts (benefits, missed opportunities, distorting effects), and scope for improvement
- Consolidate and simplify the proliferation of research translation and commercialisation programs across government
- Provide assistance to industry, especially SMEs, to promote awareness and uptake of research collaboration opportunities
- Re-establish a national research infrastructure future fund to properly support collaborative research infrastructure investment across the entire facility lifecycle, including maintenance, upgrade and decommissioning
- Support viable research career pathways to ensure the pipeline of talent
- Prioritise research categories in visa processing to favour international talent recruitment
- Restore confidence in research funding and administration through academic leadership and measures to prevent political interference
- Promote the benefits and impacts of Australian university research beyond the limited scope of commercial outcomes
- Develop and support Indigenous Australian research capability
- Set and commit to reaching a target over a suitable timeframe for R&D investment relative to GDP appropriate for a nation of our innovation and research ambition, benchmarked against our OECD competitors
- Legislate the premium rate for the R&D tax concession for companies who partner with universities, as recommended by the Ferris, Finkel and Fraser Review (3Fs Review)