

## UniSport submission to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report – August 2023

UniSport welcomes the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report and particularly the focus on the Universities' Duty of Care to Students.

While the Report does not explicitly link the vibrant campus life in states as being fostered by student unions and student clubs with its focus on well-being and mental health, the link between physical activity and emotional well-being has been acknowledged internationally in peer-reviewed studies for a long time.

UniSport has been working with its 42 Member Universities to study the impact that University-based recreational sport has on students. The findings consistently demonstrate that on-campus sport and physical recreation directly contributes to students' sense of connectedness and belonging and well as in their academic success, key ambitions articulated in the Interim Report.

We welcome the commitment to examining what more could be done to support how the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) is directed, and encourage the exploration of the contribution that sporting facilities and physical activity-based clubs make in fostering students' sense of belonging, social inclusion and cohesion.

The SSAF funding must be quarantined to fund facilities and activities that support student and staff well-being as articulated in the 2011 legislation that established the universities' and higher education providers' ability to impose the fee. The SSAF is specifically fee for student services and amenities of a non-academic nature, such as sporting and recreational activities, employment and career advice, childcare, financial advice and food services.

There is also an increasing body of evidence that suggests that university-based sport and physical activity can play an important role in assisting universities meet the Bradley Review 2008's participation target that 20% of undergraduates coming from low SES backgrounds.

The Interim Report states that the Review's Final Report will set higher targets for higher education participation and equity. UniSport has offered the Review evidence that new targets to drive action in this area, specifically those designed to "support greater access and participation for students from underrepresented backgrounds" should consider the impact of sport and recreation on student engagement, particularly those from under-represented backgrounds.

The value of sport and physical activity on mental health, participation and engagement of indigenous and international students and those from other under-represented groups is well-established in Australian higher education. We encourage the Accord to continue its focus on well-being as a critical part in its work in supporting higher education to allow Australia to achieve its full potential as an economy and society.