

12 September 2023**Student Support Guidelines Consultation Paper**

Bond University appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Student Support Policy Guidelines consultation paper. The importance of higher education providers proactively identifying students at risk of failing their chosen units of study cannot be overstated. It is not merely a matter of academic progress, but also a pivotal step in safeguarding the mental and emotional well-being of our student community. A proactive approach ensures that students receive the necessary support to succeed in their academic pursuits, enhances student retention rates, and fortifies the reputation of Australia's universities.

Student support at Bond University

Bond University, the first private not-for-profit university in Australia, places the utmost importance on the well-being and success of all its students. We provide a wide array of personalised services designed to support students in various aspects of their university journey. Our Wellbeing and Diversity Support programs are dedicated to creating a nurturing environment that promotes the well-being of all students. This commitment is reflected in the range of support available, which includes Academic Support, Accessibility & Inclusion Advisors, Student Learning Advisors, Employment Services Specialists from our Career Development Centre, and Indigenous Student Success & Wellbeing Advisors from our Nyombil Indigenous Centre. These specialised teams address a wide range of needs, ensuring that all students have access to the necessary resources and support to flourish at Bond University.

Our support framework identifies students that would benefit from services through various tools and methods. Bond has a corporate system called BondCare that records key insights regarding our students' interactions with these services. We report and monitor student academic progress and performance through the BondCare Students of Concern dashboard, Standard Student One Reports, and Academic Progress Reports. This is combined with informal feedback from academic staff in addition to other consideration such as class attendance, grade trends, class participation, and language proficiency. Concerns about a student's welfare trigger a Wellbeing Referral in BondCare, notifying the relevant Associate Dean, Student Affairs & Service Quality. Subsequent case management involves the Student Wellbeing Team and may escalate to the University Registrar. This streamlined approach ensures timely support for at-risk students, enhancing their chances of success at Bond University.

Are the proposed individual student and institutional level requirements outlined in the consultation paper practical, and implementable? If not, how could they be improved?

A critical issue raised by the consultation paper in relation to support for individuals, is the proposal to identify students who are struggling prior to the census date. This presents a challenge for universities as traditionally assessments used to demonstrate understanding and learning would mostly be conducted after this date. While engagement indicators could be used as a proxy indicator, they would not adequately assess a student's academic performance. The period at the beginning of

a course is typically dedicated to establishing foundational knowledge, which will be built upon in later stages of the course. Assessing student engagement or understanding during this initial period can be particularly challenging as the material is often introductory and may not fully reflect a student's ability or engagement level.

To address this challenge, a comprehensive pedagogical review and adaptation of each unit of study would be necessary. This would involve implementing additional formative assessments or engagement measures during the early stages of a course. Formative assessments, such as discussions, and exercises, could provide ongoing feedback on student understanding and quizzes engagement, enabling the early identification of at-risk students. However, this review and adaptation process would necessitate a significant investment of time, effort, and resources from university staff. This is a substantial undertaking and may not be feasible due to resource constraints, nor appropriate for all disciplines. It is crucial that the government considers the practicalities and resource constraints faced by universities when considering the implementation timeline for these new requirements. Higher education providers have also expressed significant concerns regarding the potential cost and complexity associated with tracking and identifying students at risk. Implementing systems that can effectively monitor the academic progress, engagement, and well-being of each student necessitates not only a financial investment in technology and resources but also a shift in the operational dynamics of educational institutions.

Furthermore, the complexity of defining what constitutes a student "at risk" can vary greatly among institutions, leading to potential inconsistencies in approach and outcomes. The overarching concern here is that these efforts, while well-intentioned, may inadvertently strain already tight budgets and divert resources from other essential areas of education delivery.

Oversight and Regulation

Over the years, universities have experienced a steadily increasing degree of oversight and regulation. While some level of governance is essential to maintain academic integrity, standards, and transparency, there is growing concern in the academic community that the scales have tipped towards over-regulation. This heightened oversight can stifle innovation, burden institutions with excessive administrative tasks, and divert resources and focus from their core mission: education and research. It's crucial that a balance be found which ensures universities maintain their standards while still being able to operate efficiently and with the necessary flexibility to adapt and innovate in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

A specific area of concern relates to the proposed reporting mechanisms, particularly the suggestion of reporting after every census date. It's crucial to note that universities operate with multiple census dates tailored to different teaching periods and formats. Reporting after each would be logistically challenging and is perhaps not fully understood by policymakers.

Additionally, the immediate implementation of the policy and associated reporting requirements starting in 2024 poses a significant hurdle for universities that are not currently equipped with the required technological infrastructure. The need for generating and segmenting data analytics at various levels - student, unit, and course - and the regular generation of detailed reports on support responses and outcomes necessitates advanced systems and a high degree of integration between existing systems. Without such system functionality and integration, meeting the frequency and level of detail stipulated in the consultation paper will become an administratively burdensome task and likely unattainable within the existing resources from 2024 onward. It is imperative that the government considers the diverse levels of technological capabilities across different universities and provides the necessary support, to ensure all institutions can adhere to the new requirements.

In summary, while the intention behind the proposals in the consultation paper is commendable, it is crucial that the practical challenges associated with implementing these changes are fully considered and addressed. Most importantly, we must ensure that the implementation of future guidelines designed to improve student experience, academic progression and success are practical and financially viable, do not place an undue burden on universities and inadvertently redirect our focus from the critical business of teaching and supporting our students.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Batchelor', written in a cursive style.

Louise Batchelor
University Registrar, Bond University