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Submission to the proposed *Support for Students Policy - Guidelines Consultation Paper*

As an Australian-founded enterprise ed-tech company, Vygo appreciates the opportunity to contribute insights and feedback on the proposed Support for Students (SFS) policy. This feedback draws upon our experience helping universities across Australia, Europe, and North America digitally transform, future-proof and empower their student support ecosystems. Our submission highlights our support for the Australian government's and higher education sector's passion and focus on ensuring all students have the personalised support they need to thrive. Based on our experience, we have also identified areas where further policy development would drive additional positive outcomes for students, universities and the government.

This submission includes the following:

- **Response** to the policy requirements as outlined in the guidelines consultation paper.
- **Recommendations** to the Minister in three key areas focused on timeline, reporting and funding.
- **Best practice example** through insights from global student experience leaders like Coventry University (UK), who have sought to illustrate a benchmark in integrated, proactive and personalised student support ecosystems that mirrors the perspectives offered in the proposed SFS policy guidelines.

What is Vygo?

Vygo was founded with the mission to ensure that no student falls through the support cracks. Vygo's student support technology has enabled universities across the globe to digitalise their support offerings. Universities utilise Vygo to cultivate an integrated holistic support ecosystem that ensures a safe, secure, and data-driven environment. Through technology, institutions foster proactive and personalised student experiences.

For students, the platform organises their institution's ecosystem of advisors, mentors, tutors and other social support services at their fingertips. It gives them the right tools to connect and engage with the people they need whenever they need them.

Our response to the Support for Students Policy Consultation Paper

We commend the Australian education sector's and the Australian government's steadfast passion and focus on fostering a learning environment where every student can thrive, a dedication evident in the decision to replace the 50 per cent pass rule introduced as part of the Job-ready Graduates package with comprehensive and transparent student support requirements. This renewed attention underscores the government's commitment to enhancing student support, with particular emphasis on uplifting Low SES and First Nations students and groups disproportionately affected by the rule, facing significantly higher dropout rates even before its inception. Moreover, we applaud the concentrated efforts to curb sexual assault and harassment on campus, working diligently to shift the prevailing culture. The initiatives demonstrate a laudable ambition to ensure that all students receive the personalised support they need to flourish in their academic and vocational pursuits.

From our decade of experience working with universities, it's clear that university staff and leadership are passionate about their students and take pride in their student's success. The consensus within the sector has long been that the student support space is weighed down with siloed approaches and technologies, which hinder a holistic and modern student experience. Although many institutions have been striving to digitally redesign their support experience, for many institutions, these projects have been continuously pushed back towards medium to long-term timeframes. These pushbacks have been exacerbated over recent years due to global events (COVID) and consistent government policy and funding changes. The sector's prioritisation of strategic student support ecosystem projects has the potential for remarkable outcomes for all stakeholders involved, including significantly improved results for equality and major delivery cost reductions.

We believe in the adage, "What gets measured, gets managed. What gets managed gets improved". The policy requirements must provide a solid framework for delivering a comprehensive support ecosystem. If implemented correctly, the current elements of cultural appropriateness and personalisation for key student demographics will positively impact students' lives and university retention outcomes. For all its merits, the discussion paper lacks a detailed and standardised framework for the measurement and reporting required.

Our recommendations for the Support for Students Policy Guidelines

Although there are purpose-built technology solutions capable of enabling the proposed delivery, measurement and reporting requirements, we believe that institutions should be given more support from the government to conduct their digital transformation projects. This would include:

- **Recommendation 1:** Provide institutions 3-6 more months beyond teaching period 1 2024 to implement their policy for enhanced student support.
- **Recommendation 2:** Provide institutions with a templated policy (including a checklist) and templated reporting document to provide clear expectations and streamline across the industry.
- **Recommendation 3:** Provide institutions with a student support technology rebate of $100k-500k each (proportional to their size) to upgrade their student support technology.

Recommendation 1: Timeframe for implementation

Under the proposed implementation of the new requirements, "higher education providers will be expected to meet the requirements of the Guidelines by the start of the 2024 academic year, to support new and returning students" appears overly ambitious. We advocate for an extended deadline aligning with the inception of teaching period two (July semester/trimester), as it allows the institutions to analyse their existing support ecosystems and identify opportunities for further development and innovation, resulting in a better outcome for students and the government.

To achieve the intended outcomes and goals of the policy, institutions will need to implement purpose-built, scalable and integrated digital solutions. The current timeframe may inadvertently incentivise institutions to opt for quick-fix 'band-aid' solutions to current practices, adding to an already congested technology stack and thereby perpetuating traditional issues stemming from a siloed approach to support ecosystems. These potential scenarios would likely degrade Australia's competitive student experience and magnify staff's challenges in reporting and scalably managing their support services. It could also slow down existing efforts to uplift the quality and efficiency of support services within the sector.

To achieve the above, we recommend the government readjust the compliance timeline for institutions to the following:
- November 30, 2023: The institution appoints a single executive with authority and responsibility for realising the SFS policy objectives, achieving compliance and overseeing transformation efforts.

- Before Teaching Period 1 2024: Live SFS policy with a 3-5 month roadmap to fully a compliant and implemented student support ecosystem model.
- Before Teaching Period 2 2024: Fully compliant student support ecosystem live for students.
- Nov 31, 2024: the first outcomes report is due to the government, with the institution's next steps and KPIs for 2025.

Recommendation 2: Reporting and cadence

The policy needs to clearly define the measurement and reporting expectations, which without, could lead to uneven reporting and undermine the goal of enhancing Australian student support outcomes. We suggest the government provide a standardised policy and report template that specifies reporting metrics at the institution and individual support service level. Only with like-for-like data can the government truly achieve transparency. With benchmarkable data, institutions can be fairly celebrated for their successes, with best industry practices continuously surfacing.

Moreover, metric requirements that ensure a 360-degree live view of individual student engagement would allow quicker identification of areas needing attention, fostering proactive support and demonstrating the institution's touch points for supporting when a student became at risk.

Below is an example of recommended standardised compliance and metric reporting depth that could be utilised by the policy[1]:

Checklist per service:
- *Accessibility compliance: WCAG*
- *Data security compliance*
- *Data privacy compliance*
- *Cost to deliver service*
- *Amount of FTE provided to run service*
- *Name of staff member responsible for compliance*

Per institution:
- *the number of students identified as requiring support, disaggregated by faculty*
- *the support provided for identified students*
- *the academic progression and outcomes of identified students*
- *the academic outcomes of the cohort generally*
- *HELP expenditure on failed units of study, per student and overall.*

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[1] Read more about Vygo's recommended technical compliance and ecosystem implementation [here](#).

- *number of student services*
- *number of at-risk students in-engaged in services*
- *cost of operating all services*
- *number of students retained*
- *number of students dropped out*

Per student support service
- *Number of students engaged with service (broken up by faculty and demographic)*
- *Type of engagement available*
- *Number of engagements per type of engagement*
- *Average number of engagements per student*
- *Average service satisfaction quality*
- *Effectiveness of support (percentage of target cohort engaged and percentage retained after census and end of semester)*
- *Student session ratings, feedback and outcomes*
- *Supporter session ratings, feedback and outcomes*
- *Evidence of timely response to negative feedback*
- *Evidence of administrator engagement versus best practice*

By fostering a culture of comprehensive and consistent reporting, universities can better gauge the effectiveness of their support services and pinpoint areas requiring improvement, driving towards the common goal of enhancing student outcomes.

Recommendation 3: Funding

There is no doubt that most Australian institutions will, in varying capacities, consider the potential financial implications of meeting the proposed requirements of the SFS policy guidelines. This is unsurprising given the prevailing challenging financial conditions most Australian institutions face in today's economic landscape. While we advocate for a phased implementation approach that allows universities to integrate purpose-built technology solutions gradually into their compliance strategies for their SFS policies within their existing budgets, we recognise the potential financial strain. To expedite meaningful change, the Department could consider instituting a Student Support Technology Rebate, ranging from $100,000 to $500,000 per institution in proportion to their size, specifically designated for upgrading student support technology. This financial support would address the monetary concerns that might deter some institutions from promptly embracing the transformative actions advocated by the Accord to achieve significantly improved outcomes.

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Best practice support ecosystem

Over several years, Vygo has been working with forward-thinking universities in Australia, Europe, and North America to cultivate holistic support ecosystems founded on the principle that access to education should be synonymous with providing equal opportunities.

Coventry University in the United Kingdom has devoted the past three years to redefining and enhancing its student support ecosystem to set a new student experience benchmark, prepare the institution for scalability, and align with the government's widening participation (equity) initiatives. Their project bears a remarkable resemblance to the intentions and framework outlined in this policy. Coventry University has implemented a model based on Diagram 1, where its support ecosystem platform operates alongside and integrates with its LMS and CRM. Coventry's model facilitates a seamless experience and integrates live data across systems to report on all support service types. Diagram 2 outlines our recommended model for Australian institutions in their approach to meeting the policy requirements comprehensively.

The technology implemented by Coventry aims to:
- Auto-connect students to services and supporters (advisors, mentors, tutors, coaches, communities etc.).
- Personalise each student's ecosystem to unique criteria, including cultural needs, preferences, location, level of study, faculty, demographics and support required.
- Provide automated and self-service support opportunities through sync, async, in-person and online support modalities.
- Implement API-integrated data and reporting throughout the entire ecosystem to enable a 360-degree student view.
- Ensure complete data security and privacy compliance with SOC2 and GDPR across all services.
- Ensure complete accessibility compliance under WCAG2.1 AA standards.

More information about Coventry's ecosystem is available [here](#).

Conclusion

We stand aligned with the government and sector's dedication to creating a landscape where any student (domestic or international) can access the personalised support necessary to flourish and achieve their goals. We applaud the ongoing efforts of universities to nurture this environment, and we look forward to the continuing conversation and discussion on student support within the Australian Higher Education sector, as we firmly believe that 'everyone deserves a world-class education experience'.

Diagram 1: A Recommended Enterprise Technology Stack for Higher Education Providers
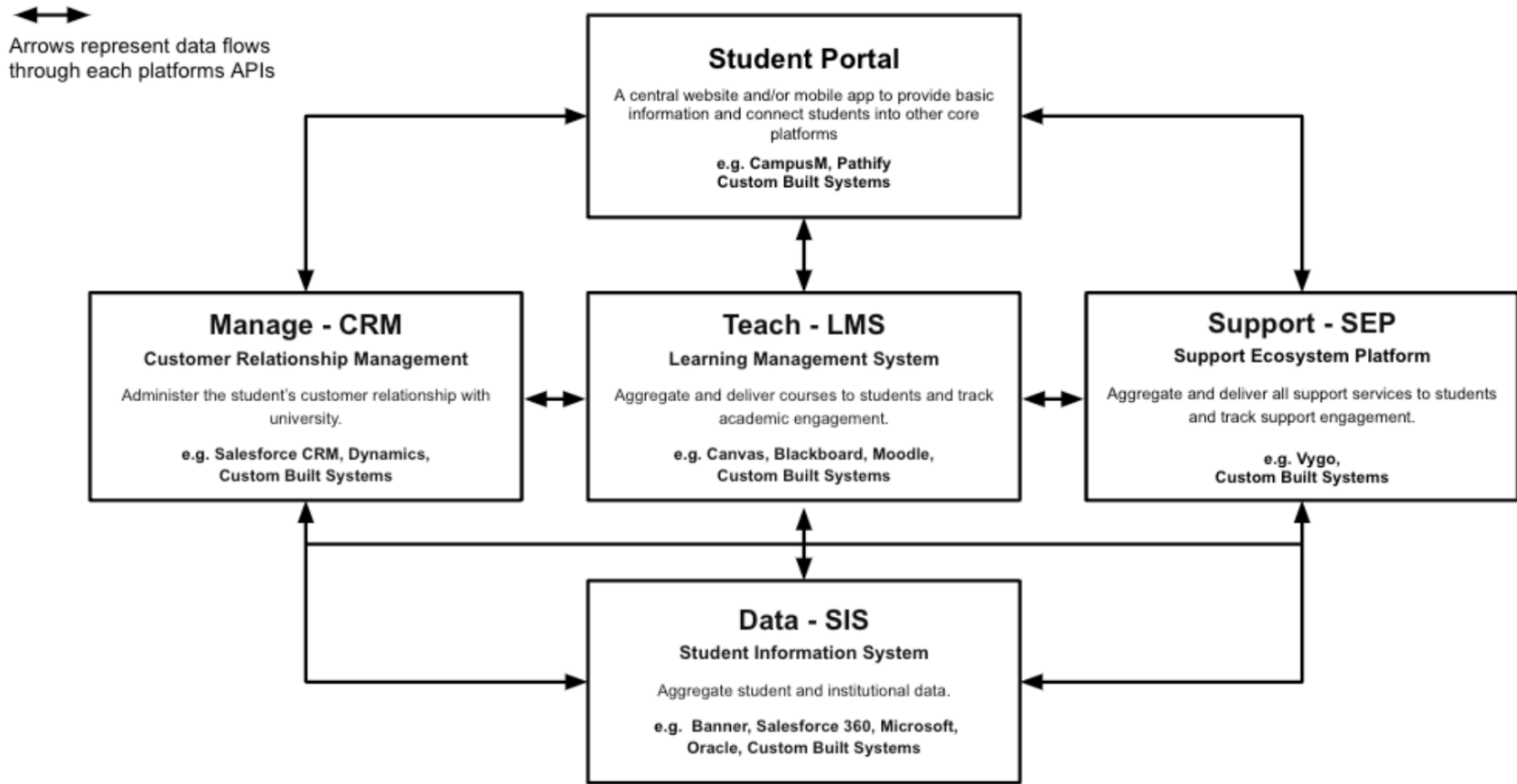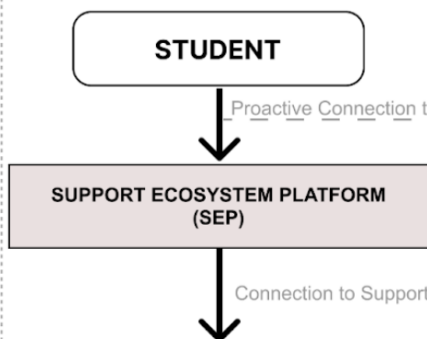

Arrows represent data flows through each platforms APIs

Student Portal

A central website and/or mobile app to provide basic information and connect students into other core platforms

**e.g. CampusM, Pathify
Custom Built Systems**

Manage - CRM
Customer Relationship Management

Administer the student's customer relationship with university.

e.g. Salesforce CRM, Dynamics, Custom Built Systems

Teach - LMS
Learning Management System

Aggregate and deliver courses to students and track academic engagement.

e.g. Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, Custom Built Systems

Support - SEP
Support Ecosystem Platform

Aggregate and deliver all support services to students and track support engagement.

e.g. Vygo, Custom Built Systems

Data - SIS
Student Information System

Aggregate student and institutional data.

e.g. Banner, Salesforce 360, Microsoft, Oracle, Custom Built Systems

Diagram 2: Support Ecosystem Model - Support Category Coverage and Tiered Example

Recommended Support Ecosystem Model - Support Coverage
SFS Compliance & Recommendations

Notes

- Every institution has their own standards, culture, preferences & cohort profiles which will shape their support offerings. This is an example of how an institution could ensure they proactively connect their students to student support services & the types of services institutions could consider to cover different dimensions of support.

- Although it's recommended that all services are aggregated & indexed into one platform for students (SEP), services can still be run by centralised & de-centralised teams throughout the institution. This may include other software for targeted needs.

- The support tiers have been categorised with the following criteria
  - Tier 1: Lowest cost & highest scaleability (ex. resources, group based volunteer support)
  - Tier 2 : Medium cost & medium scaleability (ex. 1:1 volunteer based, group based paid staff/external provider)
  - Tier 3 : Highest cost & lowest scaleability (ex. 1:1 based paid staff/ external provider)

STUDENT

Proactive Connection to SEP

SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM PLATFORM (SEP)

Connection to Support

- Student automatically connected to SEP during onboarding phase and then automatically:

  - Personalise the support ecosystem for each student with recommendations.
  - Connect students to Supporter from priority service (i.e. Success Coach or FY Peer Mentor)

Onboarding Support

Tier 1 Examples
- Institution Onboarding Resources
- Onboarding Chatbots
- Peer Social Communities

Tier 2 Examples
- Peer Mentors
- Staff Mentors
- Peer Ambassadors
- Peer Academic Mentors
- Peer Buddy Programs
- Peer Pathway Mentors
- Peer Orientation Cohort/ Demographic Communities
  - International, location- based indigenous, cultural, religious, LGBTIQA+, veterans, JEDI, age, disabilities, etc.
- Peer English Conversation Support
- Employability Workshops

Tier 3 Examples
- Pathway Advisors
- Success Coaches Staff Academic Advisors
- Career Advisors

Academic Support

Tier 1 Examples
- AI Tutoring Chatbots

Tier 2 Examples
- Peer Study Sessions (PASS/PALS)
- Peer Academic Mentors
- Academic Library Workshops
- Group Based - Numeracy Support
- Group Based - Literacy Support
- Library Workshops
- Industry Mentors
- Alumni Mentors

Tier 3 Examples
- Class Specific Peer Tutors
- Outsourced Tutoring Services
- Writing Feedback
- Staff Academic Advisors
- Librarian Support
- Career Advisors
- Student Advocacy Services

Social Support

Tier 1 Examples
- Institution Social Events
- Peer Social Communities

Tier 2 Examples
- Peer Mentors
- Peer Ambassadors
- Peer Academic Mentors
- Peer Buddy Programs
- Peer Cohort Communities
- Peer Demographic Communities
  - Indigenous, cultural, religious. LGBTIQA+ veterans, age, disabilities, etc.
- Student Union Clubs
- Alumni Communities

Tier 3 Examples
- Outsourced Tutoring Services
- Outsourced Mentoring Services
- Writing Feedback
- Staff Academic Advisors

Health Support

Tier 1 Examples
- Public Mental Health Services
- Public Crisis Support Services
- Group Based Wellness Activities

Tier 2 Examples
- Peer Mentors
- Peer Wellness Ambassadors
- Peer Social Communities Peer Cohort Communities
- Peer Demographic Communities
  - Indigenous, cultural, religious, LGBTIQ+, veterans, JEDI, age, disabilities, etc

Tier 3 Examples
- Outsourced Health & Safety Services
- Institution Counsellors
- Institution Medical Services

General Support

Tier 1 Examples
- Financial Support Resources
- Housing Support Resources
- Public Crisis Services
- Public Emergency Services
- Campus Security Services

Tier 2 Examples
- Institution Financial Services
- Institution Housing Services
- Institution Legal Services
- Institution Crisis Services
- Emergency Support
- Sexual Violence Support Communities
- At Risk Support Group

Tier 3 Examples
- Sexual Violence Support Counsellors
- Institution Crisis Support
- At Risk Support Coaches

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