

Department of Education  
Australian Government

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2023

Dear Department of Education Colleagues,

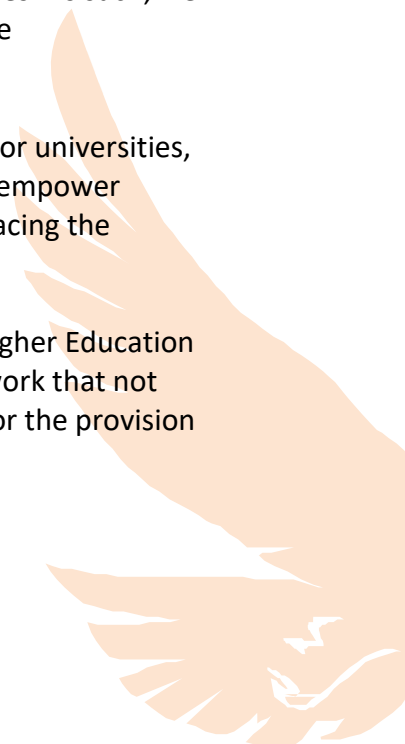
The Country Universities Centre (CUC) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Support for Students Policy Guidelines* Consultation paper. We endorse the objectives outlined in the policy, which is designed to enhance students' chances of succeeding in higher education. The policy's focus on strengthening accountability among higher education providers is instrumental in advancing social mobility.

As a network of Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) serving Eastern Australia, the CUC's primary mission is to provide access and services to individuals residing in regional, rural, and remote (RRR) areas, with the aim of ensuring their successful participation in higher education. A distinctive feature of the CUC and RUSH program is the provision of free, institution-agnostic, wrap-around services, encompassing campus-like facilities, administrative and academic support, as well as well-being assistance. This approach enables us to deliver tailored, place-based learning solutions that address the specific needs of the communities we serve.

It is noteworthy that the Accord Interim report recognised that the RUSH program has resulted in increased higher education participation in regions where they operate, consistently outperforming comparable regional and remote areas without such hubs. The support provided to CUC students by the program is lightening the burden for universities. As such, we advocate strongly for the integration of the Support for Students Policy with the recommendations outlined in the Accord Report.

The Accord Report calls for the introduction of a 'needs-based funding' model for universities, a move that we believe would enhance accountability. Such integration would empower universities to allocate targeted funding more effectively to support students facing the greatest challenges in their educational journeys.

Furthermore, we propose the inclusion of the CUC and RUSH program in the Higher Education Support Act and Support for Students policy, creating a comprehensive framework that not only facilitates higher education access but also aligns with the requirements for the provision of higher education by Australian Universities.



We recommend incentivising higher education providers to engage in collaborative partnership efforts with RUSHs as a core consideration within this policy. Universities should be required to showcase their support strategies, particularly for students who may be at risk of not successfully completing their studies. This approach aligns with the Threshold Standards and can be effectively realised through partnerships between the two entities.

A recent initiative that exemplifies this collaborative approach is the CUC's partnership with La Trobe University, which involves the establishment of an executive position within La Trobe University, serving as a vital conduit bridging the gap between the CUC and the university.. This direct relationship fosters closer collaboration, enabling both organisations to work together to provide students with comprehensive support and resources. The partnership approach also places a strong emphasis on professional development for CUC staff, ensuring they are equipped to deliver services of the highest quality.

This initiative also demonstrates the Institutional Level Requirements proposed by the Department including age and culturally appropriate academic and non-academic supports, assurance mechanisms for faithful and equitable implementation, clarity on sufficient resourcing, and access to trained academic development advisors.

In accordance with the policy's intent, "It should also be standard practice to identify, protect, and provide support for vulnerable students and students at risk of failing," the CUC strongly advocates that Regional University Study Hubs be considered as a practical requirement within the guidelines.

Thank you for considering our recommendations, we look forward to receiving an update on the Policy Guidelines.



Danielle Keenan  
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Country Universities Centre

