

## Feedback to MQ Senate in regards to the AUA Interim Report

### Part 1. Immediate Actions

Priority actions established in the interim report

1. *“Extend visible, local access to tertiary education by creating further Regional University Centres (RUCs) and establish a similar concept for suburban/metropolitan locations”*
2. *“Cease the 50% pass rule, given its poor equity impacts, and require increased reporting on student progress”.*
3. *“Ensure that all First Nations students are eligible for a funded place at university, by extending demand driven funding to metropolitan First Nations students”.*
4. *“Provide funding certainty, through the extension of the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee into 2024 and 2025, to minimise the risk of unnecessary structural adjustment to the sector. Interim funding arrangements must prioritise the delivery of supports for equity students to accelerate reform towards a high equity, high participation system”.*
5. *Through National Cabinet, immediately engage with state and territory governments and universities to improve university governance, particularly focusing on:*
  - *universities being good employers*
  - *student and staff safety*
  - *membership of governing bodies, including ensuring additional involvement of people with expertise in the business of universities.*

*Order of priority: 4, 5, 2, 3, 1*

#### **From the list of priority actions:**

MQU and its stakeholders should prioritise extending funding certainty (Priority 4). From the priority list this (in my opinion) is the most important action that should be secured for MQU funding beyond 2025.

Priority 5 (in my opinion) is heavily focused on already at MQU (one of the reasons why I chose to continue my studies at MQU). This could be reworded in a submission to detail MQU’s statistical success through:

- student employment (how many students work as well as study at MQU)
- staff safety (the efforts taken by MQU to regulate professional staff safety)
- employment after graduation (percentage of students who graduate and are placed in a full-time working position after the completion of their study).
- History of student involvement in MQU governance (e.g. Student Senate, SRC etc.)

Firstly the economics and feasibility of MQU opening a rural tertiary education centre is unknown (probably not a good idea to invest in an area that would not provide a ROI). Maybe in the future, but MQU has accommodation on campus. Maybe introducing a financial package that

can assist rural students if they choose to study and live at MQU can resolve the need for MQU to build another campus far away from its main location.

Secondly the 50% pass rule will most likely be appreciated by students. 50% pass rule is in effect to keep students in check of their commitment and their privilege of attending MQU. It is in place so that the university isn't dealing with students who continually fail each semester with little progress to their degree.

Support for Indigenous students and their aspirations in tertiary education is welcomed.

## **Part 2**

A. Putting Indigenous Australians at the 'heart of Australian Universities'. This mission is welcomed, however it shouldn't be performed to the point where Indigenous students are more valued than other students. (Shouldn't be an emotional mission just a mission towards helping Indigenous students have the same chance in attending tertiary institutions). Only about 3.8% (from ABS 2021).

We welcome a First Nations Higher Education Council to assist in this venture.

B. Ties in with Priority Action 4 (Funding Certainty). MQU supports this mission, but requires clear dialogue with the state and federal government to ensure appropriate funding matches with its growth.

C. Ties in with Priority Action 4 ~ addresses staff shortage and funding to support larger cohorts, marking and exchange of education.

National skills passport ~ possibly tied with myGov or a digital/physical form is most welcomed as it can inform students and employers with the qualification history of an individual.

D. Equity in participation can succeed with a standard reduction in tertiary fees or an introduction to a flat indexation rate (instead of a rate influenced by inflation as it can be easily weaponised against students by large banks and corporations in their corporate goals).

F. Fostering International Engagement -> depends on how the Federal Government can promote our national tertiary education in global markets, depends on the policies that would enable MQU to promote their degrees to international students.

G. Funding for universities will introduce construction opportunities, teaching opportunities, student opportunities and international opportunities for a variety of individuals.

H. Ties in Priority Action 4. Bruce Dowton mentioned that the research fund from the prior Liberal Government is being reviewed by the current Labor Party. This section would assist greatly with B, C, and F.

### **Creating the foundations of a high functioning national system**

A. Welcome a national tertiary system that would overlook and monitor the progress, and execution of the listed missions in the AUAIR.

B. This is already maintained by unique governance bodies respective in each tertiary body.

C. Suitable funding and financing needs to be guaranteed by the state or federal government. Only a guaranteed funding policy to tertiary institutions under management by a national tertiary system can assist in the demand and goals in the interim report.

### **Comments on the Ten possible ‘system shifts’ to improve Australia’s higher education system.**

1. It will be an integrated tertiary system, with a commitment to access for everyone with the potential and application, achieving significant growth in pursuit of ambitious national skills and equity targets. Following from 1.7 on page 30 of the report, the accord must clearly outline targets and commitments to improving and expanding staff positions at tertiary educations. More permanent positions will be required to support the growing student market that is projected to follow beyond 2030.
2. First Nations will be at the heart of higher education. First Nation students should not be at the heart of higher education. We should focus on programs and plans with the proposed First Nations Higher Education Council to assist Indigenous students in considering tertiary education rather than enforcing this idea. Instead of solely placing First Nations at the heart of higher education, the government should focus on more universal issues such as the cost of university and revamping the HECS Indexation Fund.
3. There will be population parity in participation by 2035, supported by student-centred, needs-based funding. Refer to comments on priority action 4. How will MQU and other universities be funded moving forward, how much, and how this will be delivered to assist in the delivery of university degrees.

4. There will be systematic investment in student support and equitable, efficient HELP arrangements. Need more information and detail about this.

We agree strongly with incentivising and valuing all academic roles in 2.4.4.3

### **Indexation**

Indexation rates historically have aligned with the inflation rate of Australia's economy, but university fees have become more unaffordable and difficult to pay off. Especially with the height of the Covid-19 pandemic many colleagues and students have felt unfulfilled and unsatisfied with the delivery of tertiary education. CPI indexation has been volatile as mentioned it went from 0.6 in 2021 to 7.1% in 2023

Main question: Will the federal government implement a flat indexation rate for university HECS debts?

We strongly welcome new HELP policies such as reductions in accumulated HELP debts or waivers of indexation.