



September 1, 2023

**Australian Universities Accord Interim Report Consultation:  
Submission from the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences  
(CHASS)**

**About CHASS:** we are a peak body with a membership of 40 humanities, arts, and social sciences (HASS) organisations, including academic discipline associations, universities, and members from HASS associated industries. Our aim is to communicate the value of HASS and its crucial role in building a thriving, prosperous, sustainable, and equitable Australia.

**Response to the Interim Report**

We thank the panel for their work to date and for providing an Interim Report and seeking feedback. CHASS welcomes the priority changes, particularly the additional support for First Nations students, the end of Jobs Ready Graduates and of the 50 percent pass rule. However, we ask the panel to further consider how they are framing the purpose of Higher Education and the reason for making changes to Australia's system.

*General Framing*

The Interim Report is framed by the statement that 'The Review believes that bold, long-term change is required to fulfil the mission of higher education in Australia. Change in the sector must be significant. Complacency cannot be tolerated'. The sector is full of excellent people working with insufficient resources. There are areas of Higher Education that may require more substantial change, but the greater requirement is to properly support the teaching and research that is currently being undertaken (reducing workloads, further administrative support, reasonable class sizes, properly funding research).

The 'bold changes' that appear to be emerging, such as greater specialisation and further micro-credentialing, are arguably simply the latest trends in higher education, changes with a mixed evidence base and that risk embedding a narrow and parochial understanding of the role of higher education will be required to fulfill in the coming decades. We encourage the Accord panel to think further about how it imagines education. The foundation for working in a changing economy, the foundation for lifelong learning and active citizenship, and the type of education that will address changing individual and collective needs over time, are broader than that presented in the Interim Report.

The final report should be built around a capacious understanding of Higher Education, using a balanced framing that recognises how to better support the excellent work already undertaken by those in the sector, and that is cognisant of the opportunities and risks associated with different options proposed. At this point in the process, it is difficult to provide concrete measures of success for outcomes of Accord recommendations (as requested by the panel). The Interim Report provides fleeting direct reference to international best practice or the evidence underpinning many of the 70 recommendations. Further presenting and discussing this evidence

base would provide a firmer foundation for assessing the benefits and drawbacks of, and appropriate measures of success for, the innovations proposed, and would help build trust within the sector.

Responding to the request from the Accord Panel for the Consultation, here we present our three main points of reflections on the Interim Report<sup>1</sup>.

### *1. Research*

While there is a separate Australian Research Council review process underway, the research landscape is much larger than the ARC and the section of the Report covering research is lacking in detail, including any reflection on the different needs and value of different areas of study and research (including HASS). Consistency of funding is important and discussed in the report, but increasing the diversity of funding avenues, which in turn increases available funding is more important, as is further embedding in the Accord an understanding that research and its impacts are far more than pathways to commercialisation.

This is the section of the report that we believe is most in need of additional attention, and we reiterate the following recommendations from our first submission:

- There is a need for a sustainable and diversified portfolio of research supports beyond the limited number of grants currently present in the Australian research landscape.
- There is a need for legislation to further support joint public-private research investment funds that can support Australian researchers and the community, potentially freeing ARC Linkage funding for other ARC schemes.
- Universities, the ARC, and other relevant bodies should be governed under legislation and policy that enshrines Indigenous expertise, disciplinary breadth (across HASS and STEM), and diversity of representation, alongside independence with appropriate oversight.

### *2. Governance*

We agree that University Governance can be improved. The proposed Board could give the sector some much needed autonomy. However, this and many of the proposals in the report, given the current detail provided, do appear to risk an explosion of data collection, auditing, and administrative burden. This could further damage already reduced levels of trust and morale in the sector. New national bodies cannot be at the expense of, or take funding from, direct support for teaching and research. A level of auditing and oversight is justified as part of maintaining public support for Higher Education and ensuring value for money. However, the balance should be towards further support for showcasing the important contribution of Higher Education to the community rather than creating a greater administrative burden.

- Higher education institutions, sector groups, and individual teachers and researchers should be resourced to undertake the important tasks of both partnering with communities and showcasing why the research and teaching being undertaken matters to the community.

### *3. Specialisation*

As noted, the Interim Report gives little attention to research and appears to be heading towards recommending a further dilution, if not a complete break, of the research-teaching nexus. Higher education is the point in the education process where students' needs are best met by the

integration of the latest research within teaching. There is a strong case to incentivise dynamic curricula where staff can teach directly in their areas of cutting-edge research expertise, and for allowing students to build expertise across disciplines and areas of specialisations. This provides the foundation for thriving in a changing world and for lifelong learning. Just like attempts to over engineer student choices, a focus on micro-credentials without this general foundation carries significant risks for the quality of education provided in Australia.

We are concerned that the push for institutional specialisation, alongside openness to teaching only institutions appears to overlook points made in our original submission about the value of a broad foundation and HASS education for preparing students for the changing future of work and their needs as citizens.

We reiterate that it is crucial that:

- Settings and incentives give students the capacity to combine areas of interest, including HASS study.
- Students in all universities and all parts of Australia can study history, society, language, Indigenous studies, and all HASS offerings.
- HASS research takes place in all communities within Australia.

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<sup>i</sup> This document was authored by Dan Woodman (CHASS President), Matthew Champion (CHASS Board Member) and Ilana Mushin (CHASS Board Member) on behalf of the CHASS Board. Member organisations contributed to discussions that informed this document, but the submission does not necessarily represent the views of these groups. The submission builds upon the evidence provided in our Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper Submission, April 11, 2023:

[https://www.chass.org.au/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=239946&module\\_id=464739](https://www.chass.org.au/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=239946&module_id=464739)