

Torrens University submission on the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report (August 2023)

Introduction: A missed opportunity to include the private sector in a broader, more encompassing Accord

As Australia's only private, investor funded university, we are delighted to see robust discussion and debate about the future of tertiary education following the release of the Interim Report. However, the challenge of creating a new environment that enables Government to achieve its goal of developing the human capital we will need in the future will be jeopardised unless all contributors, public and private, collaborate to extend the greatest opportunity to the greatest number of citizens. The Accord will be challenged to visualise a future where more capital than can be available through public funding can be brought to bear on our long-term challenges and to realise our social and economic future.

Consequently, it is disappointing that the Interim Report and discussions have been confined within a publicly funded higher education scenario.

The Interim Report highlights the prediction that 50% of jobs created will require higher education qualification in the future. But the system that is meant to deliver these qualifications and increase access, cannot succeed if it is dominated by institutions reliant on government funding. Indeed, the Intergenerational Report predicts a fall in public spending in education and training in the next 40 years. So how will higher education needs be met?

Torrens University is looking for higher level considerations which include opportunities for enterprise, public and individuals to invest in the system and reduce the burden on government funding. The final Accord must include these.

The role of tertiary education in a global context

Reform of higher education in Australia must address the role of tertiary education as an all-encompassing system and where it must head. It has to consider global dynamics in tertiary education and market behavior.

One of the most critical developments in tertiary education internationally has been private capital investment in higher education. It is widely recognised that in many economies, private investment has significantly improved access to education, taking much needed risks and enabling enhanced innovation and expansion.

System redesign and structure critical to choice and access

Again, if Australia is then to enable universal access to education to deliver on national priorities, a fundamental rethink and restructure of the entire education framework will be required. This includes a precise outline of the resources required and the envisioning of a future in which public funding and private capital contribute synergistically. The Accord needs to encompass an open market approach which:

- reflects market behavior and aspiration for high quality education
- acknowledges the diversity of providers – private and public
- recognises interdependencies, synergies and the reciprocity of all players in the sector
- rethinks the mobilisation of all manner of resources

Interim Report system shifts

The Accord Interim Report lists 10 possible changes or system shifts to enable positive change (on page 28 of the Interim Report). We welcome the focus on areas such as First Nations access, population parity in participation, student centred funding and support and a prioritisation of national outcomes through a new Commission. We agree that these should be pillars of our expanded education framework.

However, if we are to achieve a truly integrated and connected tertiary system, population parity, transform learning and teaching and enable lifelong learning— the system shifts have to recognise the role private and global education as well as international trends will play in the transformation of the sector.

Torrens University is just the beginning

As Australia's only privately funded for-profit institution on the eve of its 10th anniversary, Torrens has become the nation's fastest growing university and has built a strong reputation for quality in teaching, learning and research. In the latest QILT survey, we rank 7th nationwide for Quality of Entire Educational Experience for undergraduate students. Our research team includes one of the world's leading Artificial Intelligence experts. So, it has been disappointing that our invitation to meet with the Universities Accord Panel have not been taken up yet. This offer remains open and we hope to hear from the Panel. Our submission of big ideas to The Accord Discussion Paper in April 2023 is on [the Accord Consultations web page](#).
