



**ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM.  
FOR STUDENTS, BY STUDENTS.**

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**WOLLONGONG  
UNDERGRADUATE  
STUDENTS'  
ASSOCIATION**

**Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim  
Report**

**Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association**

## **Introduction**

WUSA is an affiliate of the National Union of Students and shares similar priorities to that of the National Union in the outcomes we wish to see from the University Accords. We want to make sure that accountability and student voice are reintroduced into the sector and are a major focus for the final report. WUSA welcomes the considerations in the interim report and wish to see the Government commit and deliver on these proposals.

## **Minimum SSAF - Student Money in Student Hands**

Students' voices are essential for an accountable and well functioning Higher Education Sector. As the largest stakeholders in HE students know what is and isn't working on campus and what is needed to support them to best succeed. At the moment students do not feel like their voice is being heard and universities have a reputation of being billion-dollar unaccountable institutions.

This is especially notable at Wollongong, compared to other student unions in Australia, WUSA has the least amount of SSAF allocated to it. SSAF allocation to WUSA is just over 3%. WUSA is financially dependent on the University to gain access to our funding, and must go through lengthy and tedious processes to obtain them. As we do not have financial autonomy many of our requests to acquire our funds is denied.

Student Unions are the primary body that student voice is carried through; they are run by students, for students, and are best informed and equipped to represent the interests and needs of the student body. They also provide vital support services on campus and act to hold universities to account when they fail to act on issues such as sexual assault.

At institutions like the University of Sydney student associations receive 62% of SSAF to run services. In Western Australia, 50% of the SSAF is legislated by the State Government. Due to this, the union is able to provide more services to students; like low cost food, migration information sessions and help for International students, autonomously run clubs and services, tailored student support and well funded autonomous collectives, like queer and women collectives. Regional Universities like Wollongong deserve to to have the same representation as the wealthy metropolitan campuses

At the University of Wollongong, the power has been taken out of the hands of students and placed in the hands of unaccountable university management. This essentially leaves WUSA as

a powerless advocacy body, compared to other student unions who have the facilities and funding to actually make a substantial difference in the lives of students. A federally legislated 50% SSAF requirement for student unions would ensure that SSAF remains in student hands and is used strictly for the benefit of students. After all, no one knows what we need better than ourselves.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) Implement Federal Legislation that would require 50% SSAF to be allocated for Student Unions at Australian Universities.

### **Duty of Care**

In the National Student Safety Survey (NSSS), University of Wollongong was shown to have high rates of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harrasment (SASH). SASH incidents have serious and long lasting implications for victims and we strongly believe the University should be held accountable to extinguish them. We also believe that the Government should take stronger action on what could become a mental health epidemic among young people, especially women and LGBTQIA+ people.

Universities have shown their failure to act over the last 5 years. Beyond releasing marketing photos there has been a distinct lack of action. This is compounded by a Federal regulator in TEQSA who refuses to hold these universities accountable and has failed to provide any action beyond a confidential letter to universities outlining their issues. We need a Federal regulator with the power to force Universities into action and hold them accountable when they don't. This should include the ability to handle individual student complaints and enforce financial penalties and improvement notices.

The Federal government should work with students to develop a national student charter which will act as a duty of care. This can be used by an empowered federal regulator as a set of standards to hold universities against.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) Create a Federal Government taskforce to establish a Duty of Care code to be imposed on Universities.

- 2) Allow the Commonwealth Ombudsman to investigate student complaints against Higher Education institutions.
- 3) Empower a national regulator to issue penalties for Universities who do not investigate or provide support after SASH incidents.

### **End Unpaid Placements**

The Minister for Employment, Tony Burke has said it before - don't work for free, and yet tertiary students are still doing it routinely. The cost of living crisis is already disproportionately affecting students and young people, but under the current system, many of them are forced to complete lengthy, unpaid placements in order to attain their degree. While they are doing these placements, they are unable to work to maintain an income, or they are working outside placement hours which leaves little time for study or even rest. The Government should take action to ensure that students are supported and are able to earn a living during their mandatory placements.

### **Recommendation:**

- 1) Immediately introduce wages for students undertaking mandatory tertiary placement.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report. We look forward to the release of the report in full.

Yours Sincerely,  
Ela Akyol  
**WUSA President**

Cheyne Howard  
**WUSA General Secretary**

**About WUSA**

The Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association (WUSA) is the peak representative body for undergraduate students at the University of Wollongong. The union undertakes advocacy work, bridging the gap between students and staff to represent student unions and work towards solutions. The union provides various welfare programs and organises campaigns on social justice issues that reflect students' opinions on campus.