

Consultation on the Accord Terms of Reference

Alphacrucis University College (AC) welcomes the opportunity to assist the Panel in the identification of priorities for the Accord process. We see this process as an important and timely review of a higher education system that is built around legacy policy settings that are no longer fit for purpose. This is especially evident in areas like funding arrangements, educational delivery models, and pathways across the tertiary education sector. We have categorized our suggested priorities according to the Accord Terms of Reference and would welcome further discussion on these items.

AC Contact:

Dr David Perry, Vice President Academic and Member of the Higher Education Standards Panel ([REDACTED])

1. Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs, now and in the future - Enhance the delivery of quality education that meets the needs of students across all stages of lifelong learning and develops the skills needed now, and in the future. This will include recommendations for new targets and reforms recognising that more than nine in ten new jobs will require post-school qualifications, and fifty per cent of new jobs are expected to require a bachelor's degree or higher.

- *In connection with TOR point 5, a priority in this area should be to explore effective learning ecology pathways from VET to HE. Meeting the needs of students across all stages of lifelong learning requires an integrated tertiary system that values VET pathways and provides students the ability and freedom to choose a pathway most suitable for their needs and aspirations. Students generally make good study choices of their own volition, but adverse funding settings can force students into institutions and courses less suited to their needs.*
- *AC recommends that this point of reference include a review of the effectiveness of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and the impact it has on effectively meeting Australia's knowledge and skill needs. The current ranking system has the unintended impact of lowering the status of VET pathways in schools, removing opportunities for vital early skill and trade development.*

2. Access and opportunity - Improve access to higher education, across teaching, learning and research. This will include recommendations for new targets and reforms to support greater access and participation for students from underrepresented backgrounds

(including First Nations Australians, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, people with disability, and regional and rural Australians).

- *Access and opportunity for all students requires a system to recognize individual student needs and provide suitable study pathways. A ‘one size fits all’ approach often neglects students from underrepresented backgrounds, yet this approach is the inevitable outcome of current funding arrangements.*
- *By limiting Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP’s) and access to HEPPP (Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program) to HESA Table A providers, student choice is limited.*
- *With the establishment of the new University College category, it is timely to review funding policy and make the link to the Provider Category Standards. Given that registration as a University College is a recognition of superior quality in higher education, University Colleges should have access to permanent Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP’s), Research Training Program (RTP) funding, and eligibility to apply for Australian Research Council (ARC) grants. The current exclusion of University Colleges from such funding is inequitable, disadvantages students, and is a result of legacy policies that have not been reviewed since the establishment of this new category.*
- *This inequality significantly limits access for students, particularly where University Colleges are decentralised and engaged in regional areas. An example includes the fact that, in 2023, several Indigenous trainee teachers based and studying clinically in Wilcannia-Forbes are having to pay full-fee for their teaching degrees due to the lack of CSPs for University Colleges. Given that teaching is a priority area for the government in terms of meeting future needs, and given the impact on underrepresented student groups, this anomaly needs to be addressed.*
- *This point should also consider new decentralised models of university education, such as the Clinical Teaching Hub model, which allows for greater regional, rural and indigenous access by allowing students to study ‘on country, for country’.*

3. Investment and affordability - Explore funding and contribution arrangements that deliver equity, access, quality and longer-term investments to meet priorities in teaching, research, workforce and infrastructure. This will include a review of the Job-ready Graduates Package.

- *This point should likewise address the funding arrangements for the new University College category as mentioned above. Currently, University Colleges are not recognised in HESA and therefore have no access to funding and are not listed on Table A or B with other University-level institutions.*

4. Governance, accountability and community - Enhance regulatory and workplace relations settings to support universities to meet their obligations to both staff and students. - Explore the contribution that higher education makes to the Australian community, national security, and sovereign capability.

- *Regulatory settings have a significant impact on the ability of higher education providers to innovate, particularly in the area of industry-based training.*
- *The Accord process should explore the application of the Threshold Standards and identify ways in which TEQSA can encourage and support innovation. For example, greater freedom to deliver courses in industry-based settings not connected to registered delivery sites would encourage innovative delivery models in connection with industry.*

5. The connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems - Explore possible opportunities to support greater engagement and alignment between the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education systems. In particular, the panel will have regard to the experience of students in navigating these systems and ensuring a cohesive and connected tertiary education system.

- *As a dual-sector provider, AC has first-hand experience of both the challenges and potential of a more cohesive tertiary education system. For example, the highly successful partnership between [St Phillip's Christian College](#) and AC serves as a demonstration of effective VET, HE and HDR integration into local communities.*
- *That being said, with clinical teaching hubs now functioning in over 100 schools, there are several significant issues observed:*
 - *VET pathways viewed as defeatist and lacking honour*
 - *Skills tracks disconnected from university pathways*
 - *Limited VET in schools (VETiS) dual pathways systems*
 - *Funding bias against VET*
- *The Accord process should prioritise strategies to promote VET pathways beginning in schools and flowing through to higher education.*
- *This should be supported by the implementation of the AQF review and streamlining of regulatory processes between ASQA and TEQSA for dual sector providers.*

6. Quality and sustainability - Examine the challenges faced by domestic and international students and staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the temporary and permanent impacts on the way the higher education sector works. - Support a competitive and resilient international education sector, reflecting the important role international students play in our society and economy, and Australia's interest in deepening partnerships abroad.

- *A priority issue to support a competitive and resilient international education sector must be a review of visa challenges for international pathways. This includes visa processing times, alignment of government agendas across all departments (e.g. DESE and Home Affairs), and more flexible visa pathways for training skills gaps important to Australia's future needs.*
- *On this last point, AC has developed several international hub partnerships which allow students to study Australian awards as part of a cohort within their home countries, but there are currently not appropriate visa categories which would enable their practicums to be completed (in partnership with Australian service providers) and enter tailored career pathways. This is in priority areas like aged care and allied health.*
- *In order to deepen partnerships abroad, the review should also engage with an analysis of regional education levels in the Pacific and the responsibility of Australia to support educational pathways. The 2022 report, **Strengthening Australia's relationships in the Pacific** noted that 'quality education and training are fundamental to boosting the potential of Pacific islander people to contribute to the knowledge and technology driven societies of the future'.*

7. Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability - Support a system of university research that delivers for Australia, securing the future of the Australian research pipeline, from basic and translational research to commercialisation. In doing so, the Accord will explore relevant initiatives and other opportunities and to further boost collaboration between universities and industry to drive greater commercial returns.

- *As mentioned above, University Colleges currently have no access to ARC funding. By broadening eligibility for competitive ARC grants, the pool of quality research projects can be expanded with no increase in overall funding.*