1. The Australian higher education system has significant strengths. These are areas where the Accord should strengthen practice incrementally rather than seek significant reform.
   1. The recruitment and education of international students, and the demonstrated capacity to invest the surplus from tuition fees to fund research thereby providing a significant multiplying effect on the taxpayer research investment.
   2. Research quality and breadth.
   3. Efficiency of institutional operation including extremely successful large universities, particularly in terms of their research output. We are leaders in the Anglophone world (a model followed by others, notably the University of Toronto) and we should build on this success rather than force scaling back.
2. The Accord should focus in the following areas:
   1. **Connection between vocational and higher education.** The Accord has the opportunity to make a transformational positive impact through a coherent and coordinated tertiary system. Learning from other jurisdictions (e.g. New Zealand, Scotland, Wales, and the failed major review in England), would help Australia to set a path which addresses structural challenges in regulation, funding, prestige, geographic distribution of opportunity, and equitable outcomes. There should be no limit to the Accord’s ambition in this area: within the terms of reference, this is the single largest opportunity (and challenge), and success in this area should unlock the ability to meet Australia’s future skills needs.
   2. **Investment and affordability.** The Accord should consider whether the current arrangements for undergraduate education represent good value for money for both students and the taxpayer, but this goes beyond the funding rates for disciplines and should consider the volume of learning. The issues include a normalisation, in some institutions, of double degrees and long programs (when compared with England, for example). It may be that similarly positive outcomes can be achieved with shorter awards, more integrated master’s degrees, and discouraging double degrees in favour of multi- or trans-disciplinary programs. Reducing the expected learning time could: 1, reduce the total costs to students and the taxpayer; 2, encourage lifelong learning through lessening the ‘one off’ investment in undergraduate education; 3, curb institutional growth meeting some commentators’ ambitions for smaller universities; 4, enable students to access more quickly the graduate workforce helping to address labour shortages; 5, improve overall degree completion rates.
   3. **Access and opportunity.** Developing a new strategy and associated regulatory regime supporting the access, academic success, and positive post-graduation outcomes of under-represented and disadvantaged groups. This is a lacuna in the current regulation of the sector, and providers (in aggregate) have not acted as they should have done to address underperformance in this area. There is a vital need to ensure that this area does not simply focus on access but ensuring success across the student lifecycle.

Dr Ant Bagshaw, 5 December 2022

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