

AHEIA Submission to the Australian Universities Accord Panel

The Australian Higher Education Industrial Association (AHEIA) is the registered employer association for the higher education sector with a membership comprising 32 Australian universities.

As the employer association for the higher education sector, representing the industrial interests of Australian Universities, AHEIA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Australian Universities Accord Panel.

AHEIA advocates for a strong and sustainable higher education sector. Our member Universities value their employees as their greatest resources and provide outstanding salaries and conditions.

For convenience, our priorities are set out below under each of the relevant Accord Panel Terms of Reference.

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.*

AHEIA Position

To continue its relevance both nationally and internationally, as well as providing for further growth and resilience, the sector will benefit from support in areas such as:

- maintaining and enhancing the ability of the sector to attract, develop and retain high quality staff (both academic and non-academic).
- continuance of reliable and transparent funding for both capital and staff to facilitate appropriate forward budget planning by universities, as well as increased availability of continuing employment for staff pursuing a career in the sector.
- immigration policy settings that ensure student and staff mobility into and out of Australia that is not unduly restrictive.
- maintaining vigorous academic freedom in Australia via a robust, unbiased, and non-partisan approach to funding decisions.
- Retaining and enhancing flexibility in hiring, so that universities have suitable options to provide both higher-degree students and external experts with opportunities to contribute their expertise in contemporary student learning settings.

This will require continued availability of flexible employment types (both casual and fixed term) to encourage university management to provide opportunities for a wide range of people to contribute to the sector, and to give people an opportunity to see if employment in

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the sector is suitable for their needs and aspirations, before making a career decision about continuing work in the sector.

2. *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.*

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*

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

AHEIA Position

It is fundamental to the higher education sector that there is harmony between the new workplace relations amendments and sector funding models to propagate long term excellence, efficiencies, sustainability and certainty in respect of research.

- The sector recognises that it will need to continue the work currently underway to ensure that staff who are employed casually are paid correctly and recognised for their contributions.
- The sector is currently engaged in constructive discussions with the Fair Work Ombudsman to develop clear and useable guidelines to ensure wage integrity for all university staff. Providing the sector with a series of practical operational guidelines to assist universities identify, resolve and monitor their activities in respect of wage integrity will be a crucial instrument in the medium to long term resolution of this issue.
- The need for the sector to have employment instruments that are modern, flexible and fit for purpose.
- Universities will need to be able to continue to negotiate employment arrangements tailored to their specific missions and responsive to the needs of their individual communities. It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of staff in the sector are paid far above the minimum rates set out in modern awards and working conditions are significantly more generous than those in the modern awards and in other industries.

In addition, the higher education sector is “wall to wall” with enterprise agreements – this framework has produced excellent outcomes for both staff and universities when compared

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with other sectors. To this end, in the short to medium term, single employer enterprise agreements should be encouraged within the higher education in preference to any form of multi-employer enterprise arrangements. Any pivot to multi-employer enterprise arrangements in the short to medium term will further amplify the disruptions currently being experienced by the sector as a result of Covid.

Finally, given that AHEIA represents the vast majority of employers in respect of workplace relations matters for the higher education sector and as a key workplace relations stakeholder it is our view that AHEIA should be a member of this panel.