

Monday, 19 December 2022

Australian Universities Accord Panel
Department of Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

Dear Professor O’Kane,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer a perspective on the Australian Universities Accord Terms of Reference.

It is pleasing that these reveal an ambitious agenda for the future. It has also been pleasing to note the emphasis placed by the Minister on matters pertaining to access and equity. Particularly in regional Australia, there exist substantial opportunities for improvement and I am certain that Southern Cross University is well placed to be a key part of the solution to this challenge as we move forward.

I expect that you will have received an enormous weight of correspondence in relation to the Terms of Reference. For economy, in these circumstances, I refer you to the submission made by the Regional Universities Network, the content of which I endorse.

To the extent that any of the matters raised in that document are deserving of further amplification, I would focus on three matters which I hope will assist you and the Panel as you undertake your deliberations.

1. **Scale and Economies of Scale** – this is discussed at some length in the RUN submission. I regard this as a core challenge to be reflected on in any widescale review of the higher education sector. The RUN submission asserts that the present funding system, in being effectively blind to scale and scale economies, has the effect of creating at least a two tiered higher education system in Australia, in circumstances in which this may not be an explicit policy objective. This seems to me to be worth detailed and careful consideration. To the extent that there is substance to this assertion, there are profound implications for infrastructure quality and renewal (to say nothing of growth), the diversity and comprehensiveness of course offerings and the capacity to invest in ubiquitous quality experiences and support for students beyond the execution of the formal curriculum.



2. **Fragmentation and Complexity** – the review offers a valuable opportunity for the panel to reflect objectively on the merits and net benefits of a funding and reporting landscape which at least at a surface level, appears to be tending to greater fragmentation and complexity. Given the relative marginality of some elements of this landscape, it would be particularly useful to reflect on transactions and overhead costs borne by higher education institutions in response to them and whether other, simpler approaches to the prosecution of desired policy objectives may be preferred in future.

3. **The Role of Anchor Institutions** – as you will appreciate given your close connection to this year’s major flooding in NSW’s Northern Rivers and the role of Southern Cross University in supporting rescue, recovery and rebuilding work in the region, some Universities in Australia have profound community service obligations that layer above and permeate their work in education and research. Over and above being key employers in their local domains and key drivers of research with direct local industry value, a number of Australia’s universities provide critical community facing infrastructure, serve as hubs for professional development and further education and stand at call in response to emergencies and natural disasters. The Accord review provides an opportunity for some reflection on this work and the ongoing frameworks necessary for its future sustainment.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to offer these reflections and am happy to assist further in any way that you may wish to request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tyrone Carlin".

Professor Tyrone Carlin
Vice-Chancellor
Southern Cross University