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19 December 2022

Professor Mary O’Kane AC
Chair, Australian Universities Accord

By email: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/consultations/higher-education-review>

Dear Professor O’Kane

UWA priorities for the Review of Australia’s Higher Education System

The University of Western Australia applauds the Government’s initiative to deliver an inclusive higher education system relevant to current and future workplace, economic and community needs through this comprehensive and consultative review process. We welcome the opportunity to provide the Panel a submission outlining our high-level priorities for the Australian Universities Accord in the context of the Terms of Reference.

Please note that we are happy for this submission to be published and have no wish for any of it to be treated as confidential.

The University of Western Australia supports the submissions made by the Group of Eight and Universities Australia.

In addition, UWA offers the following priorities for consideration by the Panel:

1. *A differentiated system responsive to a diverse group of traditional and non-traditional learners (ToR key areas 2, 3, 5)*

The present system was designed to meet the needs of a traditional group of learners. As the need for life-long learning grows and as the socio-economic diversity of traditional learners broadens, the people and nation will be better served by having a differentiated system. Such a system should be agile, and the funding mechanism should be flexible to allow institutions to differentiate in response to the changing needs of the learners they intend to serve. Current regulatory requirements and funding models promote uniformity and should change.

The education system in California covering community colleges through the California State Universities to the Universities of California is both diverse and integrated. The seamless movement of qualified students between the component systems is a good model to consider.

2. *A system that is responsive to the skills needs of the nation (ToR key areas 1 & 4)*

While Australian universities have done an excellent job in their education mission, there is still a skills gap that is holding the nation back. For example, Australia has not been able to

produce sufficient numbers of doctors, nurses, engineers and teachers to meet our needs. This is due to a combination of regulatory impediments and a non-responsive funding model. Both require major changes.

Employers also need to be engaged to bridge the skills gap systematically. A work-integrated learning model with employers as important partners is essential. Canada's successful co-operative education model, where employers provide paid internship opportunities to students with government assistance in select areas, is a good example to consider.

3. Better coordination between Commonwealth and State Governments (ToR key area 4)

Universities in increasingly knowledge-based economies are very important to the Commonwealth and to the States. The vast majority of our universities operate under the legislative mandate from their respective States. However, most of their funding comes from the Commonwealth. Better coordination between the Commonwealth and the States is highly desirable.

4. Regulatory Burdens (ToR key area 4)

It is essential that we use available resources efficiently. Ever increasing regulatory and other external burdens are taking up too much time and resources from our core mission of education, research and engagement. This is a complex issue and will require a longer time horizon to find solutions. We urge the panel to review this matter of the regulatory cost burden on the system. Such review is especially timely given the scarcity of financial resources.

5. Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability (ToR key area 7)

UWA welcomes synchronisation with the ARC review, however we also urge the review to incorporate consideration of the full ecosystem of Commonwealth funding including NHMRC, MRFF, and other research funding schemes. While we welcome collaboration between universities and industry to drive greater commercial returns, we also propose clear recognition that research lacking commercial interest and drivers may have unrecognised important future applications.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of the UWA submission further, please do not hesitate to contact me via vice.chancellor@uwa.edu.au.

The University looks forward to engaging with you and the Universities Accord Panel during 2023 throughout this important consultation.

Yours sincerely



Professor Amit Chakma
Vice-Chancellor