

# Priorities for Review of Australia's Higher Education System

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the priorities for the Review of Australia's higher education system.

UNSW Sydney welcomes the establishment of the Australian Universities Accord process as a means to ensure that the Australian university sector is sustainable, and able to continue to fulfil its critical mission as public institutions that serve the nation. This ability to contribute to national priorities incorporates teaching and skills development, as well as research activities that address many of society's greatest challenges, while also creating new economic opportunities.

## Terms of Reference

We welcome the Terms of Reference, that necessarily cover a wide breadth of issues, reflecting the diverse activities universities undertake, and the imperative that these activities are sustainable into the future, as the workforce, broader economy, and society continue to evolve.

The second area for review cited in the Terms of Reference, *Access and Opportunity*, appropriately seeks to improve access to higher education across teaching, learning and research. The intention to support greater participation by students from underrepresented backgrounds, including Indigenous, low socio-economic, people with disability, and regional and rural Australians is commendable, and one that UNSW has taken strong steps to support this year.

However, it is critically important that the Review not only considers measures to encourage greater participation by students from these backgrounds, but also the means to ensure that these students succeed once at university. We urge that this area for review be broadened to include ways of supporting student success.

The other suggested amendment to the Terms of Reference, applies to the sixth area for review, *Quality and Sustainability*. While this point references international students and partnerships, and their value to our society and economy, it should also consider the role universities play in promoting Australia's place in the world, building 'soft power' that supports Australia's global outlook.

## Priority areas of focus

In response to the request to highlight the areas for review that UNSW considers to be priorities, we suggest the following topics should be prioritised:

## 1. Supporting students to succeed

The review should focus on how the sector can best support students attending university to succeed. This includes:

- Ensuring access to university for students from all backgrounds, to maximise Australia's human capital
- Considering student fees to ensure students aren't left with unnecessarily large debts after graduation, while also acknowledging the importance of properly funding the costs to teach students across different disciplines
- Maximising student satisfaction with their university experience
- How best to ensure student success, which incorporates reaching graduation, and then finding relevant employment following graduation

## 2. Lifelong learning

A growing trend in the workforce is the requirement for workers to regularly learn new skills, and be adaptable as the skills required to do their job evolve over time. Universities are already well placed to address the need to upskill and reskill workers, with offerings ranging from Masters degrees through to micro-credentials, and emerging offerings that involve integration and pathways between universities and vocational training providers. However, to fully utilise the value of lifelong learning qualifications, consideration should be given to the role that government plays in their funding, and ensuring they are widely and appropriate available to meet demand.

## 3. Financial Sustainability

The financial sustainability of Australian universities is the foundation upon which all the other goals of the Accord process rely. A financially sustainable funding model for universities is critical to ensure that universities are able to continue to undertake teaching and learning activities to prepare graduates for the workforce. It is also critical to ensuring that our world leading research can continue to be carried out, by both funding research itself, as well as ensuring that the next generation of researchers are developed through HDR qualifications. This area of review should also consider the ability to fund new forms of education, such as micro-credentials, that will increasingly become an important part of university offerings.

## Conclusion

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the priorities for the Review of Australia's higher education system through the forthcoming Accord process. UNSW looks forward to contributing to this process throughout the coming year, and working towards the shared goal of a university sector that meets the current and future needs of the nation.

Should you wish to discuss any issue raised in this submission, please contact our [REDACTED].

